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DEPARTMENT OF MINES AND RESOURCES

HON. T. A. CRERAR, MINISTER; CHARLES CAMSELL, DEPUTY MINISTER

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BULLETIN No. 84

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SERIES No. 20

THE SEKANI INDIANS OF BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

BY  
Diamond Jenness



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OTTAWA  
J. O. PATENAUDE, I.S.O.  
PRINTER TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY  
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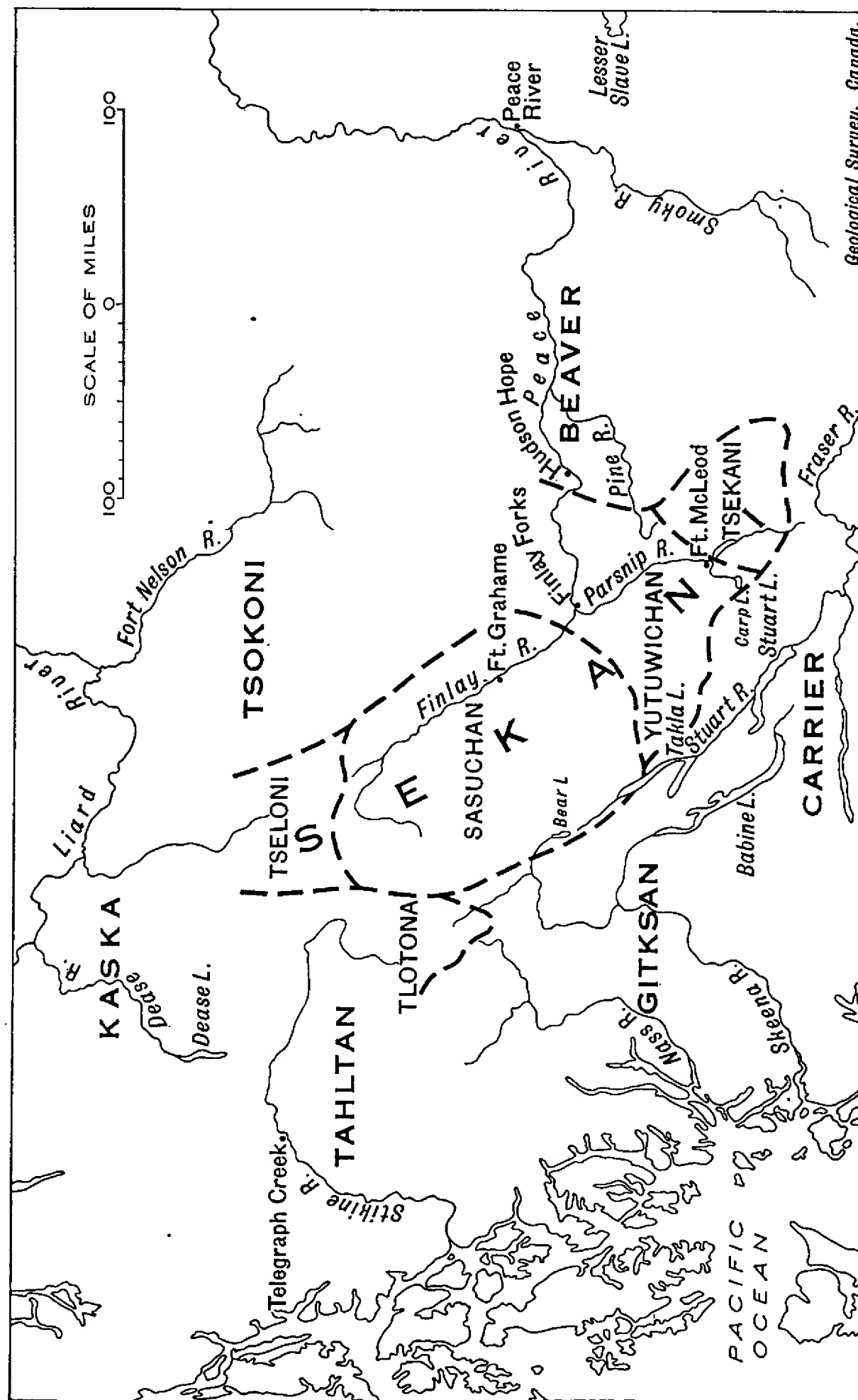


Figure 1. Sketch map showing the territory occupied by Sekani bands in relation to neighbouring tribes.

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preface.....	V
CHAPTER I	
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER II	
History and subdivisions of the Sekani.....	5
CHAPTER III	
Conflicts with neighbouring tribes.....	17
CHAPTER IV	
Physical appearance and material culture.....	27
CHAPTER V	
Social organization.....	44
CHAPTER VI	
Marriage, childhood, and burial.....	51
CHAPTER VII	
Religion.....	64
—	
Appendix.....	80

## Illustrations

Plate	I. Fort McLeod in 1924.....	3
	II. Corner of Fort Grahame in 1924.....	12
	III. Old Davie and other men of the Long Grass band.....	15
	IV. Sekani women and children at Fort Grahame.....	23
	V. Sekani robe of groundhog skins.....	29
	VI. Sekani mittens and moccasins, beaded.....	31
	VII. Rude dwelling of poles and spruce bark, Fort McLeod.....	33
	VIII. Wooden spoon and a skin scraper made from the shoulder-bone of a moose.....	34
	IX. Sekani bags of moose-hide, the upper beaded.....	36
	X. A babiche hunting bag, and a babiche net for catching beaver.....	40
	XI. A dugout canoe at Fort McLeod.....	43
	XII. Sekani family at Fort McLeod.....	53
	XIII. Sekani drum, birch-bark basket, and snow-shoes.....	57
	XIV. Old Davie and some of the women of the Long Grass band.....	67
Figure 1.	Sketch map of Sekani territory.....	Frontispiece
	2. Sketch of a Sekani beaver spear.....	38
	3. Sketch of a fish-weir.....	41





## PREFACE

The Sekani Indians of northern British Columbia centre today around two posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, Fort McLeod on McLeod lake and Fort Grahame on Finlay river. The author visited them in those places during the summer of 1924, spending three weeks on McLeod lake and a week at Fort Grahame. The information obtained at that time forms the main subject of this report.

The notes concerning the Long Grass band of the Sekani, whose home lies (or lay) in the Groundhog country at the headwaters of Skeena, Nass, and Stikine rivers, were obtained during the preceding winter at Hazelton from a Gitksan Indian woman who had spent most of her life among them. Her history, as related by herself, seems worth recording.

"I was born at Kispiox about seventy years ago. My father belonged to the wolf phratry in that village, my mother to the owl phratry, so they gave me the name *Luskayok*, which means 'Cry of the baldheaded eagle,' the eagle being a crest in my father's phratry. One of my father's sisters married an Indian of the Long Grass band and went to live in his country. When I was eleven years old, a fight occurred between these Long Grass Indians and the Kispiox people. Several Kispiox men were slain, and five Long Grass Indians, among them my aunt's brother-in-law, who was killed by my mother's brother. The two peoples then settled their quarrel by holding a feast together in the Groundhog country, and my parents, lacking a son, sent me to live with my aunt as a mark of goodwill. The Long Grass people treated me very kindly, and when I was fourteen years old married me to a young chief named Kaiyeish, whose grandmother had been a Kispiox woman also. We were very happy for many years, and had six children, four of whom are buried beside my husband in a big cemetery in the Groundhog country. At first we lived in lodges of cedar-bark chinked with moss, but later we obtained cloth tents from the Hudson's Bay Company. From early spring until nearly Christmas we wandered in and around the Klappan mountains hunting and trapping, then we travelled south to Bear lake, or less often, northward to Telegraph Creek, to trade our furs. Occasionally we visited Bear lake during the summer also, in order to see my people; but we never went to Telegraph Creek during the summer because the Long Grass Indians are not allowed to fish in Stikine river. When my husband died in 1907 his brother wanted to marry me, according to the usual custom; but I refused him, because my husband had told me to return to my people. So the Long Grass people took me down to Bear lake and restored me to my family, who came up from Kispiox to receive me."



# THE SEKANI INDIANS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The territory of the Sekani comprises all the valleys within the Rocky mountains between latitude (approximately)  $54^{\circ} 20'$  and  $58^{\circ}$  north that combine their waters to make the mighty Peace river, which, flowing east and north, joins the still mightier Slave and Mackenzie rivers to empty at last into the Arctic ocean. On the west the boundary coincides with the line of the Pacific divide except for a spur around Bear lake; and on the east with the line of the Rockies (and the boundary of the province of British Columbia) except for another spur down Peace river to Rocky Mountain canyon.

Within this basin all the valleys converge into two main arteries, the valley of Parsnip river that flows northward, and the valley of the Finlay that flows south. From Finlay Forks, at the 2,000-foot contour, where these two rivers join, their valleys rise swiftly, the Parsnip to the 3,000-foot level, the Finlay to the 4,000. Mountains from 4,000 to 6,000 feet flank them on either side. On the Finlay and its tributaries the valleys become narrower and steeper towards the headwaters; but on the Parsnip they open out towards the south and west, into a more undulating plateau country that is broken by many small lakes.

The whole country is heavily wooded. There is a little cottonwood and birch at the lower levels, but the predominant trees are balsam, spruce, and pine, with a considerable growth of poplar in burnt valleys. The rivers, fed by the snow and glaciers of the mountains, are swift and muddy; with many canyons and rapids. During the flood season of early summer they cut deeply into their banks and produce numerous sloughs that from time to time alter the main channels. Nevertheless they were the Indians' principal highways, because the country was too rugged, the forests too dense, to permit of easy travelling overland. Many rivers had their sources in fair-sized lakes, or in chains of small lakes, which the Sekani frequented for their whitefish and trout.

The climate is rather dry, and most of the moisture falls during the winter months as snow. At McLeod lake the mean temperature in January is around zero, and in July the thermometer sometimes touches  $90^{\circ}$  F. Spring comes in the first half of March, as a rule, and the ice leaves the lakes some time in April. Potatoes and other vegetables yield excellent crops at the two settlements, Forts McLeod and Grahame, but clouds of mosquitoes plague the outdoor worker unless a strong, cool breeze drives

them to cover. Along the river banks and in burnt areas are many blueberries and saskatoon berries which the Sekani ate raw, not dried and mixed with grease after the manner of the Carrier and coast tribes. Bird life is inconspicuous, though the Indians shoot a fair number of grouse, ducks, and geese. Drifting down the rivers in summer one occasionally sights a black or brown bear, a moose, or an otter on the bank, but the animal quickly disappears in the woods.

Since their rivers drained eastward and northward to the Arctic the Sekani lacked the great shoals of salmon that were the mainstay of most of the Indian tribes in British Columbia. Only in one place, around Bear lake, did their territory extend into the salmon area beyond the Pacific divide, and they were excluded from that area in the second half of the nineteenth century. They fished extensively for trout and whitefish both in summer and in winter, but relied for their food supply mainly on the wild animals in which their country abounded. Within the forests there were numerous black and grizzly bears, moose, beaver, porcupine, and rabbits; on the mountain slopes caribou, goats, sheep, and groundhogs. To the east, beyond the Rocky mountains on the prairie south of Peace river, roamed many herds of buffalo that the Sekani had hunted previous to the nineteenth century, and on which their thoughts lingered long after they were confined within the Rockies by the hostile Beaver and Cree. The grassy plateau to the northwest, around the headwaters of Finlay river, is still one of the finest game areas on the continent. There caribou and groundhogs are particularly abundant, and on the neighbouring mountains sheep and goats; but the moose that are now becoming common reached the district, apparently, not more than half a century ago. The Sekani generally spent the period from about November until mid-summer on the plateaux and mountain slopes, running down the caribou and moose on the snow,<sup>1</sup> and when the snow had melted driving them into snares and trapping groundhogs. About mid-summer they resorted to the lakes to fish, or visited the various tribes beyond their borders.

There were many passes through the mountains that gave them access to their neighbours. In the north they crossed from the valley of Fox river, a tributary of the Finlay, to the Kachika or Muddy, a tributary of the Liard, which brought them into contact with the Kaska branch of the Nahani Indians. Eastward there was a route up Ospika river via Laurier pass to the upper waters of Halfway river, which led down to the Peace half-way between Hudson Hope and Fort St. John; another, straight down the Peace, which is navigable the whole distance at certain stages of the water except at Rocky Mountain canyon and at Vermilion falls many hundred miles beyond; a third from the Misinchinka valley across Pine pass to Pine river, which joins the Peace nearly opposite Fort St. John; and a fourth from the headwaters of the Parsnip to the Wapiti, a tributary

<sup>1</sup> "They get plenty of animals that is Moose and Red Deer by chasing them with their dogs when the crust." First Journal of Simon Fraser, Series C, No. 16, Bancroft Collection, Pacific Coast MSS., University of California, April 22, 1806.

of Smoky river that joins the Peace near the modern town of Peace River. Two routes led southward to the Fraser, the route taken by Mackenzie from near the source of Parsnip river across to James creek, McGregor river, and the Fraser, and an easier route from McLeod lake up Crooked river to Summit lake, thence over a short portage to Salmon river and the Fraser; the latter has become still easier today through the construction of a motor road from Prince George to Summit lake. Westward there was a route from McLeod lake via Carp lake to Fort St. James on Stuart lake, used by the Hudson's Bay Company for the freighting of supplies down to as late as 1900; one up Nation river to Nation and Takla lakes; one up Manson river to Manson creek, thence south to Stuart lake or west to Takla lake; one from Fort Grahame up the Mesilinka to Bear

PLATE I



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Fort McLeod in 1924, showing the Hudson's Bay Company house and store on the right. lake; one via Ingenika river and another by the Finlay itself to Thutade and Tatlatui lakes, whence there were trails across the divide to the headwaters of Stikine and Skeena rivers.

The routes to the eastward led to the Beaver and Cree Indians, who were not only hostile, but nearly as primitive as the Sekani themselves. Accessibility from this quarter was really a disadvantage to them, except that it brought them the fur traders and, ultimately, relief from the attacks of their enemies. The Kaska to the north contributed nothing to their welfare; those first cousins were even lower than themselves in the scale of civilization. South and west, however, were the Carrier Indians, who had long been in contact with the Shuswap, Bella Coola, and Gitksan; and the Sekani themselves met the Gitksan around Bear lake. Indirectly, then,

they came under the influence of the rich cultures on the Pacific coast, and began to orient their lives westward. It was from the south and west, from the Carrier of Fraser river and Stuart lake and from the Gitksan of Bear lake, that they obtained the dentalia shells and the supply of iron observed by Sir Alexander Mackenzie when he passed through their country in 1793 on his way to the Pacific ocean. In these directions the routes are shorter and the trails easier than elsewhere, so that the Sekani have maintained their relations with the west, and today have very little contact with the Indians lower down Peace river.

## CHAPTER II

## HISTORY AND SUBDIVISIONS OF THE SEKANI

The Sekani of northern British Columbia comprise a number of bands with no central organization and very little unity. To the neighbouring Carrier they are the *ttat'ten* or "people of the beaver dams," to the Indians on Skeena and Naas rivers the *t'set'sa'ut*, a word that they cannot interpret. The Tahltan call them *tsekini* or *tsenekin*, "people of the contorted rocks," according to some unpublished notes of James Teit, and the same authority states that the Kaska know certain bands as *tseloni*, "mountain top people," and *sastotene* "black bear people." The Sekani themselves have no common name that covers all their subdivisions, but only names for the separate bands.

The term Sekani appears for the first time in Harmon's Journal,<sup>1</sup> where it is applied to natives living on Parsnip, Finlay, and Upper Peace rivers in the same localities as the Sekani of today. Harmon conjectured that "the people who are now called Sicaunies . . . at no distant period, belonged to the tribe, called Beaver Indians, who inhabit the lower part of the Peace River; for they differ but little from them in dialect, manners, customs, etc. Some misunderstanding between the Sicaunies and the rest of the tribe to which they formerly belonged probably drove them from place to place, up Peace River, until they were, at length, obliged to cross the Rocky Mountain." In his day many of the Sekani spent the winter months on the east side of the mountains, but withdrew in summer to the Finlay and Parsnip basins from fear of the Beaver and Cree. Concerning their western limits he gives little information. In an early passage of the journal he states that they were often attacked by the Tacullies (Carrier) and Atenas (Shuswap and Gitksan) while they were on the west side of the mountains; in a later passage he describes their constant visits to Stuart lake and their adoption of Carrier manners. On Tachie river, within the territory of the Stuart Lake Indians, there was a village inhabited mainly by Sekani who were rapidly amalgamating with their Carrier neighbours.<sup>2</sup>

Harmon's theory concerning the eastern origin of the Sekani bands is supported by the narratives of still earlier explorers. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the first white man to explore the upper reaches of Peace river, gives a fairly detailed description of the Sekani under the name "Rocky Mountain Indians." He seems to apply this name to two distinct groups: (1) a western branch of the Beaver as yet uninfluenced by Cree culture, who controlled the river from its junction with the Smoky to Hudson Hope;

<sup>1</sup> Unless the "Cigne" frequently mentioned in the Journal of the Rocky Mountain Fort, Fall, 1799, means Sekani (Washington Historical Quarterly, October, 1928).

<sup>2</sup> Harmon, D. W.: A Journal of Voyages and Travels; Andover, 1820, pp. 190, 193, 215, 308-310.

and (2) another group, the Sekani of modern writers, who had been driven farther up the river from Rocky Mountain canyon to the basins of the Parsnip and the Finlay, although they still crossed the mountains in their hunting and even visited his post near Peace River landing. This second group of "Rocky Mountain Indians," the Sekani proper, still claimed as their territory all Peace river above its junction with the Smoky, and represented the first group as intruders who would shortly confine them entirely to the western side of the mountains. Mackenzie's narrative suggests, without stating explicitly, that there were two bands at the headwaters of Parsnip river, an eastern band on the Parsnip itself that consorted with the Carrier of the upper Fraser, and a western band on McLeod lake that was more intimate with the Carrier of Stuart lake. He found two Sekani captives in a mixed camp of Carrier and Shuswap near Quesnel, and a Sekani man travelling with the Naskoten River Carrier to Bella Coola.<sup>1</sup>

Mackenzie travelled through this country in 1793. Twelve years later Simon Fraser established posts at Hudson Hope and McLeod Lake, and his journal for 1806 contains several references to the Sekani without applying to them that name. At "Rocky Mountain House" (Hudson Hope), he traded with Indians of two bands: (1) Meadow Indians, or Gens du large lands, whose hunting grounds were on the upper reaches of the "Beaver" (South Pine) river, and (2) a closely allied band frequenting Finlay river that traded with "Nakane" (Kaska) Indians to the north and with Carrier and Gitksan at Bear lake and perhaps elsewhere. At Hudson Hope Fraser was visited by more than 200 "Meadow" Indians who told him that their numbers had been greatly reduced by the raids of "Beaver" Indians.<sup>2</sup>

To the Sekani of McLeod lake Fraser gives the name of "Big Men," and he mentions that a branch of them inhabited the upper waters of Nation river. At McLeod lake, Carp lake, and at the divide between the Parsnip and the Fraser he found Carrier visiting the Sekani.

Fraser mentions another tribe, "Says-Thaw-Dennehs or Bawcanne" Indians, who dwelt, apparently, at the headwaters of Smoky river and on the tributaries of the Fraser on the other side of the mountains. They were at enmity with the Carrier and "Beaver," but friendly with the Sekani of McLeod lake.<sup>3</sup>

No other information seems to be available concerning the history of the Sekani previous to the nineteenth century. We know, however, that in physical appearance they resembled their eastern neighbours, the Beaver Indians, more than they resembled the Carrier, who adjoined them on the west; also that their dialects are almost the same as the Beaver, but differ considerably from the Carrier. It seems fairly certain, therefore, that not many centuries ago the Sekani and Beaver were one people

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, Sir Alexander: *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793*; London, 1801, p. 140 *et al.*

<sup>2</sup> "Beaver" in this journal seems to mean Cree, the Beaver Indians proper being called Slaves.

<sup>3</sup> For the relevant quotations from this unpublished journal *See Appendix.*



divided into many bands which differed but little in language and in customs. Their territory stretched from lake Athabaska west to the Rocky mountains, which a few bands had probably crossed before the eighteenth century. About the middle of that century Cree drove the eastern bands around lake Athabaska up Peace river. They in turn drove west their kinsmen, who were further harassed by Cree raiding parties from Little Slave lake.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth century we seem to distinguish the following divisions:

- (1) A group, named Beaver by Mackenzie, that extended from the junction of Smoky and Peace rivers to the falls below Fort Vermilion. This group had already adopted Cree culture.
- (2) A group that controlled Peace river from its junction with the Smoky to Rocky Mountain canyon, Mackenzie's Rocky Mountain Indians, the Beaver of Fraser and Harmon. This and the former group have given rise to the present day Beaver now settled between Hudson Hope and Fort Vermilion.
- (3) A group at the headwaters of Smoky river, Fraser's Bawcenne or Says-Thaw-Denneh Indians. Of this group I can find no trace in the later literature. It may have been exterminated, it may be represented by some half-breeds now living around Grande Prairie and Pouce Coupé, or it may have merged with the Beaver on Peace river, especially at Dunvegan.
- (4) A group that frequented the headwaters of the South Pine and the adjacent Parsnip river, Fraser's Meadow Indians, or Gens du large lands. They probably survive in the half-breed population around Grande Prairie and Pouce Coupé, for the Sekani of Forts McLeod and Grahame, and the mixed Beaver-Sekani of Hudson Hope, still speak of "Meadow" Indians in that vicinity, naming them variously *t'lokotenne* (Fort McLeod), *t'loketchanne* (Fort Grahame), and *t'lowetchanne* (Hudson Hope). The Fort Grahame Indians state that these Meadow Indians lived west of Dunvegan at the time of the first white explorers, and the Indians of Fort McLeod assert that they used to meet them on Pine river. It is not unlikely, however, that a large part of this group amalgamated with the Parsnip River Indians who traded at Fort McLeod and became merged with the modern Sekani.
- (5) A group, the Rocky Mountain Indians of Mackenzie, the Big Men of Fraser, and the Sicaunie of Harmon, that occupied the country around Parsnip and Nation rivers. It was in close contact with the neighbouring Carrier both on Fraser river and at Stuart lake. One band had almost coalesced with the Carrier; it had adopted the same mode of life and established a village just to the north of Stuart lake in Carrier country.

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie: Op. cit., pp. 145-6.

- (6) A group on Finlay river that traded with the Skeena River Gitksan and with Carrier at Bear lake, and with Kaska Indians from the Liard River basin. Fraser gives this group no name, but Harmon includes it under Sicaunie.

These six groups were undoubtedly divided into many bands, and neighbouring groups mingled so intimately, and so closely resembled one another, that the distinction into Beaver and Sekani must have been largely arbitrary. On what basis, then, did Harmon make this distinction, and whence did he obtain the name Sicaunie?

When Harmon first visited this country there were only four trading posts west of the fort, near the junction of Smoky and Peace rivers, viz., at Dunvégan, St. John,<sup>1</sup> Hudson Hope, and McLeod lake. The Indians from the Smoky to Hudson Hope were rapidly adopting Cree culture in the same way as their kinsmen around Fort Vermilion; moreover, they were uniting with the Cree in attacking the Indians farther up the river. The bands west and south of Hudson Hope were alike in two respects; they were all at enmity with the Indians farther down the river, and were all strongly influenced by the Carrier, so that they looked westward for their trade rather than eastward. Harmon, therefore, had some justification for dividing them into two tribes. His predecessors had applied the term Beaver to all the eastern bands, and the name Sicaunie which he gave to the western division was merely an extension, unconscious perhaps, of the name of the band that claimed the country around Fort McLeod to all the bands that hunted west of the Rockies. His classification has prevailed in all the later literature, although even today it is impossible to draw a sharp line between Sekani and Beaver Indians, and the Indians of Hudson Hope, who are usually classed as Beaver, might be included with almost equal justice among the Sekani.

What people, if any, occupied the basins of Finlay and Parsnip rivers previous to the Sekani we do not know. Native tradition and archaeology are alike silent on this point. Very possibly the region was uninhabited, or, if inhabited, only by a few straggling Carrier who wandered farther afield than the rest of their nation. The Carrier themselves may have entered British Columbia by way of Peace river and its headwaters, or they may have come down from Stikine and Liard rivers in the north; but so thoroughly had they assimilated the culture of the older tribes to the west and south that many centuries must have elapsed since they first occupied their present homes. Doubtless they knew the country east of the divide, and occasionally hunted over portions adjacent to their own territory; but, except perhaps on Nation lakes, they seem to have made no permanent settlement there, as they did to the south and west.

Fort McLeod was established in 1805, Fort Connolly, on Bear lake, in 1826. The former post attracted the more southern Sekani, the latter the Sekani of the Finlay River basin, who then ceased to visit the trading

<sup>1</sup> This old Fort St. John was at the mouth of South Pine river.

posts at Hudson Hope and St. John where they were liable to attack by Beaver and Cree. Thus Sir George Simpson, when approaching Finlay Forks on upper Peace river in 1828, "fell in with two Indians of the Chicaneé tribe from which we got a little dried meat. They had beaver, which they mean to trade at Trout Lake (Fort McLeod). This tribe is at variance with the Beaver Indians, and do not like to visit the establishments of Peace River . . . . I believe at this moment some of them visit another of the New Caledonian posts in Conolly's or Bear's Lake."<sup>1</sup>

Very little attention was paid to the Sekani during the nineteenth century down to the time of Dawson. M'Lean, in 1833, saw a large encampment at Hudson Hope, and another at McLeod lake;<sup>2</sup> Richardson did not visit the country, but mentions the "Tsitka-ni, who dwell between the Stikeen and Simpson's rivers, to the north of the Carriers,"<sup>3</sup> and Selwyn, grouping Sekani and Beaver together, states that they did not go below Dunvegan.<sup>4</sup> Dawson alone attempted to define the boundaries of the tribe. He says: "The Siccanies lie to the north and east of the Carriers, occupying the west part of Tacla lake and the region about Bear or Connolly lake. They extend up the North Finlay about 75 miles and down the main stream of the Peace river to Hudson's Hope. North of the Siccanies and toward the coast, are the Nahanies, who are said to speak a different dialect, while the Indians still further north, about Cassiar, are different still."

In a later passage he adds:

"The Sicannie Indians of the vicinity of Fort McLeod, travel eastward up the Misinchinca, but apparently visit it very seldom, as there is no well-marked Indian trail. Near the Summit lake we found traces of an Indian camp a few years old, and we were informed that a trail of some sort leads to this place from the Parsnip west of the Misinchinca valley."<sup>5</sup>

Father Petitot, writing in 1876, says that most of the Sekanais, or The-kka-ne, "The people who dwell on the mountain," were living near the trading posts on Fraser river, but that a small number frequented the upper parts of Peace and Liard rivers, where they had acquired a great reputation for savagery. (In a later work he mentions that in 1878 about sixty Sekani visited Great Bear lake.<sup>6</sup> This seems highly improbable; I suspect it was a band of Northern Nahani that descended Gravel river from the western flanks of the Rockies.

The only writer since Dawson who has given any attention to the Sekani is Father Morice. Unlike Harmon, Dawson, and most writers, including the author of the article on the Sekani in the Handbook of American Indians, Morice does not restrict this name to the bands dwelling

<sup>1</sup> Simpson, Sir George: *Peace River. A Canoe Voyage from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific*, in 1828. Ottawa, 1872, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> M'Lean, J.: *Notes on Twenty-Five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Company*; vol. I, p. 238 (London, 1849).

<sup>3</sup> Richardson, Sir J.: *Arctic Searching Expedition*, vol. II, p. 31 (London, 1851).

<sup>4</sup> Selwyn, A. R. C.: *Geol. Surv., Canada, Rept. of Prog. 1875-1876*, p. 60 (Ottawa, 1877).

<sup>5</sup> Dawson, G. M.: *Geol. Surv., Canada, Rept. of Prog. 1879-80*, pt. B, pp. 30, 45 (Ottawa, 1881).

<sup>6</sup> Petitot, Père: *Monographie des Déné Dindjé*, Paris, 1876, p. 26; *Autour du Grand Lac des Ours*, Paris, 1891 p. 464.

to the west of the Rockies, but includes the Beaver Indians and even the Sarcee. His classification of the different bands or tribal subdivisions is:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) *Yû-tsû-t'qenne*, "people down over there," from Salmon river (a tributary of the Fraser) to McLeod lake, thence to the Fraser, by 53° 30'.
- (2) *Tsé-kéh-ne-az*, "little-people-on-the-rocks," between McLeod lake and the summit of the Rocky mountains.
- (3) *To-ta-t'qenne*, "people-a-little-down-the-river," on the eastern slope and adjacent plains of the Rocky mountains within British Columbia.
- (4) *Tsa-t'qenne* (who call themselves *Tsa-huh*) or Beaver-people, who roam over the large prairies contiguous to Peace river, on the south side of that stream and east of the Rockies.
- (5) *Tsé-'ta-ut'qenne*, "people against the rocks," living chiefly at the base of the Rocky mountains on the north side of Peace river.
- (6) *Sarcees*, living east of the Rockies by about 51 degrees latitude north.
- (7) *Sas-chût-'qenne*, "people of the black bear," from 56 degrees to the north, whose trading post had been Fort Connolly.
- (8) *Otzæn-ne*, "people between or intermediary," between the territory of the *Saschût'qenne* and that of the *Tsélohne* on the west side of the Rocky mountains.
- (9) *Tsé-loh-ne*, "people of the end of the rocks," immediately north of the *Otzænne*; they traded at Fort Grahame.

Morice's classification is frankly based on linguistic, not political or cultural, considerations. Even so it is not altogether satisfactory, for if we include the Sarcee in the Sekani group we should include also the Kaska and other tribes in the north who speak dialects no less closely akin to Sekani. The term would then lose all reference to tribal units. It seems preferable to restrict the name Sekani to its old meaning, as endorsed by the Handbook of American Indians, namely, to the bands of Indians who dwell on the western side of the Rockies around Parsnip and Finlay rivers and their tributaries. They centre at the present time around two posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, one at Fort McLeod and the other at Fort Grahame; but a few of them trade sometimes at other places, such as Takla Lake, Fort Babine on Babine lake, Lower Post on Liard river, McDame Creek on Dease river, and even at Telegraph Creek on the Stikine.

In the early days of the nineteenth century, according to the natives now living around Forts Grahame and McLeod, the Sekani, as defined above, were divided into four bands, each of which possessed its own hunting territory.

<sup>1</sup> Morice, Rev. A. G.: Notes on the Western Dénés; Trans. Can. Inst., vol. IV, 1892-93, pp. 28-29.

- (1) *Tsekani* (*tsekani*, Fort McLeod dialect; *tsekenna*, Fort Grahame dialect): "Rock or Mountain People," who occupied the country from McLeod lake south to the divide, and east to the edge of the prairies.
- (2) *Yutuwichan* (Fort McLeod dialect; *yutuchan*, Fort Grahame dialect): the meaning of the name is uncertain, but one conjecture of the natives was "Lake People." This band occupied the country from the north end of McLeod lake down Parsnip and Peace rivers to Rocky Mountain canyon; westward it extended to the headwaters of Manson and Nation rivers, including in its territory Carp lake and the upper reaches of Salmon river.
- (3) *Sasuchan* (*sasutten* or *sasuchan*, Fort McLeod dialect; *sasuchan*, Fort Grahame dialect): "People of the Black Bear." The territory of this band covered all the basin of Finlay river from the mouth of the Omineca north and west, including Thutade and Bear lakes.
- (4) *Tseloni*: "People of the End of the Rock or Mountain." The territory of this band comprised the plateau country between the headwaters of the Finlay and the Liard; the Fox in its upper reaches, and the Kechika or Muddy river, flow through the centre of the band's domain, but the exact boundaries are uncertain.

Figure 1 (Frontispiece) shows more clearly than any description the boundaries of these four bands, in so far as they can be determined at the present time; the northern and western limits of the *Tseloni* are still unknown.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the Sekani, harassed along their eastern boundaries by Beaver and Cree, were still expanding westward. They had crossed the height of land and occupied the country around Bear lake and the north end of Takla lake; they had even established a village on Tachie river, in close proximity to the Carrier of Stuart lake. Southward they had occupied the country around the junction of Fraser and Willow rivers until about 1790, when the Shuswap drove them north into the mountains again.<sup>1</sup> One adventurer encountered by Sir Alexander Mackenzie was journeying with Blackwater River Carrier to Bella Coola, over 200 miles from his home; and as late as 1811 a small war party that left McLeod lake to raid the Fraser Lake Carrier was stopped by Harmon at Stuart lake.

The establishment of trading posts at Forts McLeod and Connolly checked their expansion. Fort Connolly became the rendezvous of three tribes, the Sasuchan Sekani, Carrier from lake Babine, and Gitksan from the upper Skeena. The Sekani and Carrier were generally on friendly terms, but with the Gitksan the Sekani waged intermittent hostilities, and at last began to retreat eastward. About 1890, therefore, the Hudson's Bay Company removed the post to Fort Grahame (then called Bear Lake Outpost or simply B.L.O.) where the Sekani could trade without molesta-

<sup>1</sup> Teit, J.: The Shuswap; The Jesup North Pacific Expedition, Memoirs of the Am. Mus. of Nat. Hist., vol. II, pp. 524, 546ff.  
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tion. A few of the *Sasuchan*, who had intermarried with Gitksan, moved northward into the Groundhog country at the headwaters of Skeena and Stikine rivers; a few joined the Carrier of Babine; but the majority settled around the new post on Finlay river and resigned the western section of their country to the Gitksan and Carrier. So now Gitksan Indians from Kiskargas and Kuldo claim Bear lake as their territory, and Carrier from Babine cross Takla lake and hunt on Manson creek and the upper waters of the Omineca in districts that formerly belonged to the Sekani. On the eastern side some Beaver-Indians from Hudson Hope have at times ascended the Peace and established trap-lines on Ospika river, and *t'sokoni* Indians from the Nelson River basin have crossed the mountains to hunt at the head of Akie river, which flows into the Finlay above Fort Grahame.

PLATE II



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Corner of Fort Grahame in 1924, showing a permanent storehouse on posts.

In the south, too, the Sekani have receded. When Harmon was factor at Stuart lake the *Yutuchan* band controlled not only Carp lake, but the headwaters of Salmon and Nation rivers, including Nation lakes. Now the Sekani in this region have declined in numbers, and the Carrier have advanced into the Nation Lake district and even to Carp lake, only 26 miles from Fort McLeod. Although there has been much intermarriage between the Stuart Lake Carrier and the combined Tsekani and Yutuwichan bands of Sekani at Fort McLeod, the latter still despise the former as "ugly and greasy fish-eaters" and resent their encroachments on Sekani territory. On the other hand, the Carrier immediately south of

them, the Fort George group, have declined as much as the Sekani, and no longer frequent the headwaters of the Parsnip as in Mackenzie's day, or visit McLeod lake for trade. Eastward the boundaries remain much the same as formerly, except that the Sekani no longer cross the mountains in their trapping and hunting.

A census made by the Department of Indian Affairs in 1923 gave a total Sekani population of 160, of whom 61 centred around Fort McLeod and 99 around Fort Grahame. The proportion of males to females was 86:74, so that some of the men have to seek wives in other places. Estimates of the population given by earlier writers are unreliable, but without doubt it has greatly declined.

In the summer of 1924 there were 36 adults living around Fort McLeod. Of this number:

- 25 were of pure Sekani origin belonging to one or other of the four bands.
- 3 women were pure Carrier from Stuart lake.
- 7 were half Sekani, half Carrier.
- 1 was half Sekani, half Beaver of Hudson Hope.<sup>1</sup>

In the same year, of the 25 adults living at Fort Grahame:

- 16 were of pure Sekani origin.
- 1 was a pure Beaver of Hudson Hope.
- 2 had one parent a Red River native.
- 3 had one parent a *Tsokoni* Indian from Nelson River area, on the east side of the Rockies.

The intermixture with surrounding tribes is probably greater than appears from this table, which covers only two generations. As the country opens up it will proceed more rapidly, so that within fifty years the Sekani will probably disappear altogether as a separate tribe, unless they are confined on a reservation.

I have mentioned that on the removal of the Hudson's Bay Company's post from Bear lake to Finlay river, a few of the *Sasuchan* Sekani, who had intermarried with Gitksan Indians, drifted north to the Groundhog country. There they have formed a new band known to the *Sasuchan* Indians of Fort Grahame, who meet them around Thutade lake, as the *t'lotona* or "Long Grass" Indians, in allusion to the grassy plateau that forms their hunting ground. Old white residents on Skeena river often name them the "Outlaws," because fugitives from justice in the lower country have taken refuge in this remote band until the hue and cry of pursuit have died away. To the Tahltan of the north they are known as *T'lokotan* or *T'lukotene*, according to the unpublished notes of James Teit. Their territory really belongs to one of the Tahltan clans (*Tlepanoten*), but the usurpation took place without friction, probably because the Tahltan, reduced in numbers by an epidemic, had more or less abandoned this section of the country. The Long Grass Indians generally trade at Telegraph Creek, but do not remain there for the fishing season, as they

<sup>1</sup> The "Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico", Bull. 30, Bureau of Am. Ethnology, appears to be in error when it states (art. Takulli) "An independent band (of Carrier) has settled at Fort McLeod, in the Sekani country."

have no fishing rights in that place. They sometimes visit Bear lake still, and occasionally Takla lake. The number of the band is unknown; in 1923 it appeared to contain about eight families.

The *Tseloni* band amalgamated with the *Sasuchan* or Bear Lake band when Fort Grahame was established, and a new band of breeds, known to the *Tseloni* and *Sasuchan* Indians as *Otzane*,<sup>1</sup> now occupies its old territory on Fox and Kechika rivers. The leader and creator of this band was a man named Davie or David, the son of a French-Canadian trapper and a *Sasuchan* mother. Marriage with a *Tseloni* woman gave him hunting rights in the old *Tseloni* territory, where he raised a family of four daughters. He selected husbands for them with great care; one was a Kaska Indian, the second a *Sasuchan* Sekani, the third a half-breed, with a Scotch father and Kaska mother; the origin of the fourth, now dead, is unknown. Another family of breeds, probably kinsfolk of Davie's wife, joined the band, which in 1924 numbered forty individuals. Davie wielded the authority of a Hebrew patriarch. He kept his party in its hunting grounds aloof from all settlements except for two or three weeks in the early summer when he led them to a trading post, either Lower Post on the Liard or Fort Grahame on Finlay river; and at the posts he camped away from other Indians lest the craving for an idler and more luxurious life should sap the energies of his people and induce some of them to remain. Thus, when he visited Fort Grahame in 1924 he camped on the opposite bank of Finlay river, and departed as soon as he had disposed of his furs. His band was remarkably free of the diseases that have attacked the surrounding Indians; the adults were well clad, the children clean and healthy. As hunters and trappers their reputation was unsurpassed in the whole of British Columbia. But Davie, the leader, was an old man in his seventies, and none of the younger men seemed capable of taking his place. White trappers and prospectors were already invading their hunting grounds, and isolation would soon be impossible. So this attempt to create a new and independent tribe could only prove abortive.

The separation of the Sekani from the Beaver, and the creation of these two new bands within modern times, throws an interesting light on the manner in which new bands and even tribes may have arisen in the distant past. The Beaver, under pressure from the Cree and the early fur traders, adopted a new culture and lost their feeling of kinship with the western members of their group. These western members, the Sekani, had already developed new contacts with Carrier and other tribes, and the formidable barrier of the Rocky mountains assisted a cleavage that was already developing through outside impulses. The levelling power of white civilization has prevented the Beaver and Sekani from becoming markedly distinct, but the parallel case of the Beaver and Sarcee shows what might have happened if the white man had delayed his coming for another century; for the Sarcee, who separated from the Beaver group

<sup>1</sup> The Gitksan and western Carrier Indians often apply the term *Otzane* to Fort Grahame.



not much earlier, apparently, than the Sekani, adopted the culture of the Blackfoot in its entirety and retained nothing from their old home except their language.

The rise of the *t'lotona* or Long Grass Indians, and of the *Otzane* or Davie's band, illustrates a second process in the evolution of tribal units. In the case of Davie's band a single family (it makes no difference that one member was a half-breed) became dissatisfied with its old environment and moved away into another territory. In time it developed a spirit of antagonism, or at least of independence, towards its former home and people. The new environment proved favourable, outsiders who married the sons and daughters remained there, and within half a century the

## PLATE III



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Old Davie and other men of the Long Grass band. (Photo by Wm. Ware.)

one family became the nucleus of a new tribe that claimed a definite territory and possessed a definite name. Davie's band took the name and territory of a kindred band that had recently dissolved; the Long Grass Indians, who probably arose, not from one, but from two or three kindred families, seized part of the territory of an alien tribe and obtained a new name descriptive of their new home. Davie's band is increasing rapidly, but remains in such close contact with the mother group that the two may ultimately unite again, or Davie's band absorb the other. The Long Grass Indians are more remote, and have already taken on the culture of foreign tribes, Gitksan and Tahlitan. If conditions favoured their increase, they might easily gain the status of an independent tribe; but their number

is small and apparently stationary, so that their neighbours will certainly absorb them, just as the Stuart Lake Carrier have long since absorbed the Sekani whom Harmon visited on Tachie river.

Still a third process has operated among the Sekani in recent times, the amalgamation of separate bands into a single unit. The *Yutuchan* and *Tsekani* bands, that were often at feud during the first half of the nineteenth century, now occupy a single village at McLeod lake and have almost forgotten their old separation. Similarly the *Tseloni* and *Sasuchan* bands have combined at Fort Grahame. The prime causes of these amalgamations were three: (1) closer contact at the trading posts; (2) the erection of permanent houses of wood around the trading posts instead of temporary lodges of brush or skin; and (3) the partial destruction of the bands through introduced diseases. Two at least of these causes, trading posts and diseases, are directly attributable to Europeans; but parallel forces, for example, destruction through war instead of disease, undoubtedly produced similar amalgamations long before any European made his appearance on the stage of Indian history.

The history of the Sekani bands during the last two hundred years probably repeats, with modifications due to white influence, the history of other Athapaskan-speaking tribes that crossed the Rockies or descended from the north along the western flanks of the mountains many centuries earlier. This will appear still more probable when we examine the social organization and mythology of the present day Sekani, and perceive how they have tried to follow exactly the same road as their Carrier and Tahltan neighbours.

## CHAPTER III

## CONFLICTS WITH NEIGHBOURING TRIBES

The preceding section outlines the general history of the Sekani from their discovery to the present day. Down to the middle of the nineteenth century, the Cree and Beaver raided them on the east; on the west the Sekani attacked and were counter attacked by the Gitksan. The Carrier of Babine and Stuart lakes were generally friendly, but the Sekani often raided other divisions of the Carrier tribes to the south, and their neighbours, the Shuswap. Each tribe has its own version of these conflicts, but all blend truth and fiction so inextricably that it is impossible to reconstruct the true course of events. A few Sekani accounts are given here, prefixed with a list of tribal designations, since confusion often arises through a tribe being known under different names to the surrounding peoples.

The Sekani call the Gitksan Indians *ada'*, "labret" people, because they wore labrets in their lips.<sup>1</sup> The Gitksan name the Sekani *t'set'sa'ut*, a term of uncertain meaning that includes also the Tahltan and Kaska tribes to the north, and the Athapaskan tribe, now extinct, that once occupied some territory on Portland canal. The Carrier are named *Agili*<sup>2</sup> by the Sekani, a word that seems to mean "something tied up." The Fort Grahame Sekani interpreted it as "back-pack," because the Carrier who visited them so often carried packs on their backs; but the Sekani of Fort McLeod explained it more plausibly as "the people who are 'tied up' with fixed dwellings, possess permanent homes," in contrast with the Sekani themselves, who lived a migratory life. Different branches of the Carrier are given special names; thus the Fort Grahame Indians call the Babine Lake Carrier *naadotenne*, "fish-hawk people," because, like hawks, they live mainly on fish; and the Carrier of Fort George are known to the Fort McLeod Sekani as *kleglindjenne*, "people at the mouth of the river." The Carrier for their part call the Sekani *t'tatten*, "people of the beaver dams," a term that the Sekani of Fort Grahame apply in turn to the Beaver of Hudson Hope, although fully aware of its application to themselves. To the north the Sekani knew of the *na'ani*, "far-away people" or Tahltan, and the *esbaataptenne*, "goat-people"<sup>3</sup> whose centre is at Lower Post on Liard river. For the Beaver as a whole the Sekani have no general designation, but speak of the *adzikochanne*, "people who live at the mountain that looks like a buffalo head," i.e.

<sup>1</sup> This is probably the same word as *attah*, the name they applied to the Shuswap. "They (two Meadow Indians) desired us to be on our guard and beware of the At-tah which is the name both them and the big men gives the Atnah tribe whom they represent as more treacherous than really wicked and wood likely if not aware shoot their arrows at us" (First Journal of Simon Fraser, May 28, 1806).

<sup>2</sup> Morice (The Great Déné Race, Anthropos I, p. 275), says that the Sekani call the Carriers *arelne*: "Carriers": but I did not hear this term.

<sup>3</sup> The "Sheep Indians" of anthropological literature.

the Beaver of Hudson Hope; the *Dodachenne* (Fort McLeod term), or *Dodachanne* (Fort Grahame term) "people of the dead water below the canyon," i.e. the Beaver of Moberly lake; the *t'lokotenne* (Fort McLeod) or *t'lokocharne* (Fort Grahame), "the grass or meadow people," i.e. the Beaver of the Grande Prairie region; and the *t'satene* (Fort McLeod) or *t'satow* (Fort Grahame), "beaver people," i.e. the Beaver of Fort St. John and along Peace river to the eastward. A semi-mythical people called *Dishinni* was commonly identified with the Cree.

The Gitksan encountered only the Sasuchan and Long Grass bands of Sekani, whose territories bordered their own at Bear lake. The Hudson's Bay Company's post established at this lake in 1826 served not only the Sekani, but the Gitksan villages of Kispiox, Kiskargas, and Kuldo. Naturally conflicts arose over hunting rights in the vicinity, and the Sekani finally retreated northward and eastward. Nevertheless, in their own versions of the struggle, they invariably claim the superiority. The Hudson's Bay Company's post, they say, was built on an island. Five Gitksan Indians from Kiskargas once tried to reach it on a raft, but were seen by a Sasuchan Indian on the island, who summoned his two sons by sending up a smoke signal. Before his sons arrived the Gitksan drew near, and he shot four of them with his arrows; the fifth he allowed to return, bidding him warn his people that the Sekani would treat in the same way every other party of Gitksan that ventured near Bear lake.

On another occasion a party from Kispiox fought with the Sasuchan Sekani near the shore of Bear lake. The Sekani wore on their left arms oblong shields of wood (*askwani*) coated on the outside with pitch and sand. One man whose dream-guardian was wind tripped over a stick, and a Kispiox Indian struck at him three times with an ax, but each time the blow was foiled by his dream-guardian. Then a brother-in-law came to the rescue and killed the Kispiox man. The Sekani slew ten of their enemies in this fight. The Gitksan of Kispiox and Kiskargas then requested a Stuart Lake Carrier, Ishal, who had married a Kiskargas woman, to negotiate a peace with the Sasuchan Sekani. The two bands held a great potlatch at Bear lake, and the two leaders of the Sekani exchanged clothes with the two leaders of the Gitksan. Thereafter they lived at peace, and the Kispiox Indians continued to visit Bear lake to exchange for the furs of the Sekani trade goods that had come up Skeena river from the coast.

It was several years before the conclusion of this peace, around 1840, apparently, that a few families of the Sasuchan Sekani broke away from the main band and established themselves as the T'lotona or Long Grass Indians in the Groundhog country. Although they married frequently with the Gitksan, from whom they were separated by Klappan mountains, any member of one tribe who hunted in the territory of the other was killed without pity. Five Long Grass Indians and several Gitksan were killed in a fight about 1865. Then a joint potlatch was held at the headwaters of Nass river, and the Gitksan as a mark of good will pre-

sented to a Long Grass family a little girl eleven years of age. The girl married a Long Grass chief, with whom she lived about thirty years; after his death his relatives conducted her to Bear lake and delivered her back to her people.<sup>1</sup>

The Sekani remember no conflicts with the Tahltan or Kaska Indians to the north, or with the Carrier of Babine lake; but they speak of many feuds with the Carrier of Stuart lake, claiming that the latter avoided them and fought from ambush only. There is a tradition, probably fanciful, that a Stuart Lake war party, travelling in seven canoes down Parsnip and Peace rivers, ran into the Rocky Mountain canyon, from which nothing emerged except fragments of their canoes.

John Tod, who was factor at Fort McLeod from 1823 to 1832, witnessed the ill feeling that existed between the Sekani and the Carrier in his day. He writes:

"At Fort McLeod, where Mr. Tod had lived nine years, feuds among the tribes were rife, and consequently hostilities often broke out among them. The Indians used to tell him that the bow and arrow was a good deal more effective in war than the musket. And in case of hunting buffalo, deer, etc., the arrow by penetrating, stuck fast, so that should the animals enter the woods or bush it was found they were unable to proceed far before they fell. Ere the gun, a great many more Indians also were killed by the use of the bow, now almost wholly out of date.

"On one occasion a tribe came into the fort. The Indians were called Sycanees and came from the Rocky Mountains. They went in to trade, smoke, etc. I went outside and counted another band of canoes coming up with Indians. They also had tobacco given them for a smoke. These were the Suckalies (Carrier) and were at enmity with the other tribe. They met and there was a row. On each side of the big mess hall, they were drawn up ready to use bows and arrows, guns, etc., on one another. Hearing of this I rushed in bare-armed, commencing to abuse them at an awful rate; swore and kicked; rushed one side, then at the other, seized their arms and banged them about generally. One fellow was about driving a dagger into another. Seizing this I took it from him, and the mark of it remains in my hand to this day. At last I completely cowed them."<sup>2</sup>

The Tlokotenne or Meadow Indians, of Pine and upper Smoky rivers, were always on friendly terms with the Sekani, whom they met frequently along the eastern foothills of the Rocky mountains. Both bands traded at Hudson Hope during the first years of the nineteenth century, and both were attacked by the Tsatene lower down the river, so that by 1826, when Sir George Simpson passed through on his way to the coast, the Meadow Indians had apparently disappeared from this region as a separate band, and the Sekani of Finlay river were avoiding Peace River

<sup>1</sup> See Preface.

<sup>2</sup> History of New Caledonia and North-West Coast, by John Tod; Mss. Series C, No. 27, Bancroft Collection (from copy in Geological Survey Library, Ottawa).

trading posts in favour of the post at Bear lake. The Tsatene, like the Cree, sometimes crossed the mountains and raided the Sekani in their own territory. They are said to have wiped out ten families at the head of Parsnip river, carrying away the younger women and the children. This was before the Sekani had obtained many fire-arms. Fort McLeod natives state that the last encounter occurred at Carp lake somewhere around 1850, when the Sekani, discovering a party of Tsatene lurking in their vicinity, shot one of them from ambush. In the morning they heard wailing on a hill-top, and found a corpse that had just been buried. The other Tsatene fled, and never crossed the mountains again.

From Fort McLeod comes also the following story:

A man went out to hunt moose one morning, leaving his wife and mother to move camp. As the women walked along their dog barked at something in the rear, and the younger woman, going back to see what was the matter, found ten Tsatene warriors holding it by the leash. They captured her, but allowed her to return with the dog when she promised not to reveal their presence. Her mother-in-law asked her why the dog had barked, but she merely answered that she had seen nothing, and knew no reason. The two women continued their journey and made camp. When the man returned late in the evening, carrying a moose, his mother drew him aside, saying "Come here. I have some meat for you"; and she added in a whisper "Keep watch to-night, for your wife is concealing something." The man and his mother both kept watch. Toward dawn the old woman went down to a creek and waited, listening. She heard men stepping into the water lower down and counted them, breaking pieces from a twig for each one; there were ten. She hastened back to camp to tell her son, but already he had heard the noise and was trying to withdraw his bow from the pack. Now his wife, when arranging the pack the night before, had looped the strap around the bow-string so that he could not withdraw the weapon without unfastening the entire pack. Enraged at her treachery, he leaped on her with both feet and killed her. Six Tsatene men sprang out and tried to capture him, but they fell to the ground, one after another, the tendons of their heels cut by the old mother with a small flint knife. The hunter, whose dream-guardian was caribou, sprang into the bushes crying *sh sh*, and so strong was his medicine-power that the Tsatene could neither hold him nor overtake him. The four uninjured Tsatene then went away, leaving their disabled comrades to starve. The old woman remained unharmed, for the Tsatene, instead of killing old people, merely disfigured them by crushing the nasal bones between the fingers. When the hunter returned three nights later, she was lying on the ground awaiting him. He whispered "Come," and she arose and fled with him. The six Tsatene warriors died of starvation.

The fame of the Beaver spread even to the Carrier of Fraser lake and its vicinity, who still threaten their naughty children that the Tsatene will carry them away. But among the Sekani they were less dreaded than the

Cree, *Dishinni*, who had passed the mountains before Mackenzie's day, and who extended their raids, then or later, to Carp lake, between McLeod and Stuart lakes, and to Fort Grahame on Finlay river. The Gitksan and the Tahltan also knew and dreaded them, though they probably never came into direct conflict with them, but merely heard of their depredations from the Sekani. The Cree have, therefore, become a semi-mythical people among these western tribes, though very real to the Sekani. The meaning of the word *Dishinni* is unknown.

The natives of Fort McLeod say that the Cree, armed with guns, often wandered to Carp lake before the first white men appeared, and that the Sekani, having only bows and arrows at that time, could offer no effective resistance. The Cree raided them principally for women, whom they carried off to become their wives. They attacked the Sekani in three places one summer, at the head of Parsnip river, on Pack river, just below Trout lake, and at Finlay Forks, the junction of Finlay and Parsnip rivers. Many Sekani of both the Tsekani and Yutuchan bands were killed in that year.

The Cree once carried away two women of the Tsekani band. Though well treated these women became homesick and seized the first opportunity to escape. They possessed no knives, and had no means of making fire; but they snared grouse with spruce roots and ate them raw; and they built rude rafts to cross the rivers they encountered. After travelling in this way for two weeks they reached their own country.

Two brothers were hunting groundhog one summer in the high mountains near the head of Smoky river. Two Cree, one of whom carried a gun, entered their camp while they were up the mountain, and only their wives remained behind. The Cree did not harm the women, intending to carry them away; but they ascended a short distance above the camp to intercept their husbands. Toward evening the two hunters appeared on the crest of a ridge above them. One Cree shouted "I am going to shoot," and fired his gun; but the bullet passed between the two men. The elder Sekani said to the younger, "Let us throw rocks at them, or they will kill us." The younger brother threw a rock, and missed. Then the elder brother, whose dream-guardian was the groundhog, rubbed a large stone against his chest, breathed on it, and hurling with all his might, struck a Cree on the forehead. The other Cree, seeing his companion dead, fled; but the same hunter threw another stone in the same way, struck him in the nape of the neck, and killed him also.

East of Parsnip river one spring was a family consisting of a hunter and his young wife, the girl's mother, and her younger brother, the last being a mere boy. While the man and boy were hunting some Cree entered their camp, killed the old woman and kept the girl as a captive. They then awaited the return of her husband. The girl heard him crossing a stream near the camp and shouted, "Run. The Cree have captured me." The man dropped his pack and fled, followed by the boy; and the Cree pursued them. As the boy could not run fast enough, his brother-in-law said "Go

back and weep as you give yourself up. The Cree never kill small boys like you." The boy returned weeping, and surrendered himself to the leading Cree, who planted a hat on his head to show possession and sent him on to the camp. The hunter escaped, but the Cree carried away his wife and brother-in-law, whom they secured each night with cords, fastening one end to the neck and hair of each captive, and the other to a warrior's waist. After they had travelled three or four days, the girl remembered that her dream-guardian was the beaver, and that she carried a small piece of flint like a beaver's tooth under her belt. That night, when the Cree were sound asleep, she cut the cords with the knife. The two children then fled to the woods, and concealed themselves in the leafy branches of a tall tree. The Cree sent out a bird, one of their dream-guardians, to look for them. It settled on top of the tree and called *ka ka ka*: but the girl, who had greater medicine-power than the Cree, threw a stick and killed it. All day the Cree searched vainly; one man even gazed right into the tree where the children were hidden without seeing them. When night came, and their enemies had returned to camp, the girl and boy descended from the tree and fled towards Parsnip river. Now when the girl's husband returned to his camp after the departure of the Cree an eagle, his dream-guardian, circled over his head and said to him: "In nine or ten days your wife will pass by here." He, therefore, killed three beaver and built two canoes of spruce bark. One canoe and two of the beaver he left on the river bank for his wife and her brother; in the other canoe, with one beaver, he returned to his home. Within ten days, as the eagle had foretold, the girl and her brother returned, found the canoe and the two beaver, and regained their people.

A Sekani hunter and his aged mother went to Carp lake to fish, and other Sekani intended to follow them. Three families of mixed Cree and Beaver came to the same lake. The eldest Cree, named Usdjenta, had three wives, one of them a Sekani woman named Chiwan who had been taken prisoner many years before; the second Cree had two wives, the third one; and all three men had many children. They pitched their camp at a distance from the Sekani, and never moved away from it after dark. Consequently the hunter, instead of fleeing and abandoning his aged mother, left his camp before daylight every morning, travelled far out into the woods in different directions, marking the snow to indicate to approaching Sekani that there were Cree in the neighbourhood, and returned long after sunset. His mother, whom the Cree did not molest by day, sat up and kept watch while he slept. At last, eight Sekani families came and joined him. Usdjenta, the eldest Cree, decided to attack them, although his two companions shrank from the unequal contest; but Chiwan, his Sekani wife, secretly warned her people, who attacked first, killing men, women and children, even a young girl who fled on to the ice and begged for mercy. Chiwan alone they spared, although they killed her children, lest when they grew up they would try to avenge their father's death.



In another year some thirty Cree paddling in three canoes down Parsnip river discovered three Sekani families camped on the bank. While the children fled, their parents loaded their guns; but the Cree shouted "Friends, friends," making signs of peace, and disembarked close to their camp. The Sekani believed them, brought back the children from the woods and joined in a common meal. One of the Cree, taking a fancy to a little Sekani girl, said to her, "Run away and hide. In a few minutes we are going to attack your people"; but the child, too young to understand the meaning of his words, neither ran away nor told her people. As soon as they had eaten the Cree went down to their canoes; but when the Sekani followed to see them depart the Cree seized their rifles and shot down the whole party. Then they plundered the tents and continued their way down the river, toward Finlay Forks.

PLATE IV



60707

Sekani women and children at Fort Grahame.

Now it happened that a large band of Sekani was hunting elk near Finlay Forks; three men, with dogs, were pursuing a wounded elk that had fled up the mountain, while the other hunters ranged themselves along the bank at intervals of about half a mile to intercept the animal when it was driven into the water. The oldest and most experienced hunter, who was stationed at the southern end of the line, saw a man examining the river from a promontory farther up, and, suspecting that he might be a Cree, launched his canoe into the water and watched.<sup>1</sup> As soon as the Cree

<sup>1</sup> Indians travelling on a river in hostile country stopped at every curve and landed one of their number on the point to search the route ahead.

rounded the point in their three canoes, he pushed out from under the bank and fled down stream, shouting to each hunter as he passed, "The Crees are coming. Follow quickly to protect our families." One after another the hunters shot out from the bank and followed him to the camp. The Cree approached, shouting "Friends, friends," and, meeting with no hostility, stopped close to the camp, dragged their spruce-bark canoes on to the bank for sleeping-shelters and prepared to dry their meat. The Sekani recognized some of their kinsmen's possessions in the hands of the Cree, and an old woman named Kloazi, Mouse, brandishing a spear, urged her people to take vengeance; but they were afraid of a battle, because the two parties were almost equal in numbers. So the Cree and Sekani remained side by side for two days, neither party daring to attack the other, and neither willing to leave first lest it should be trapped on the march. So they sat in their camps and feasted, the Sekani supplying most of the meat. On the second day the Cree had an argument among themselves, and one man said "I am going to embark. Who will come with me?" Three men paddled away down the river. The other Cree then said to the Sekani, "Tomorrow we are going to hunt elk. Let some of your warriors accompany us." The Sekani selected four young men, whom they warned to keep watch and to sleep at a distance from their companions. The Cree and the four Sekani travelled fast all day without halting; when night came they built their fires some distance apart and kept watch, both sides fearing an attack. The Sekani said to each other in the morning "Let us pretend to hunt squirrels, and when the Cree go on ahead we will run away." Soon they came to a grove of jackpine where a squirrel was racing among the branches. The Sekani chased it, laughing, and when the Cree called to them they answered "Go ahead. We will overtake you presently." But as soon as the Cree were out of sight the Sekani fled over a low hill. The Cree fired a few shots at them without result, then, fearful of returning to their canoes, continued down the river on foot to their own country.

On another occasion a party of Cree armed with guns ascended Finlay river and pursued two Sekani men of the Sasuchan band into a mountain a little north of Fort Grahame. One of the Sekani hurled down a large rock, which struck a Cree on the forehead and killed him. Hence the mountain is now named "Man struck by a rock."

Two families of the Sasuchan band who were descending Finlay river to the Forks to hunt moose were massacred by some *Nadowa* Cree who wore their hair short, whereas the other Cree who were raiding the Sekani at this time wore their hair long. The Beaver of Hudson Hope now apply the name *Nadowa* to the Cree of Moberly lake, a few miles to the south.

To the T'lotona band of Sekani, as to the Tahltan and Gitksan, the Cree, *Dishinni*, have become a semi-mythical people. They are always dressed in buckskin adorned with beads, and travel four or six in a band, without women. If observed they disappear, changing into burned trees or vanishing into thin air without leaving a trace. Sometimes they stand

four in a row on a hill-top and watch runners being dispatched to discover who they are; but when the runners draw near they disappear. To shoot at them is useless, for they can catch a bullet in the air. They hover around camps to steal the women, making mysterious noises; the T'lotona have often seen their footprints or the marks they have made on trees. Berry season is their favourite time for raids. They expectorate on their hands and wave them in the air when they sight a woman, and the woman, unable to scream, falls into their hands; or they transform themselves into logs when the men pass by, only to resume their human form and seize any women who may be following behind. One party of *Dishinni* penetrated as far as Kispiox, the Gitksan village on the upper Skeena; but when it saw the women carrying baby cradles it turned back, mistaking the cradles for coffins. Many years ago Dishinni stole a four-year-old T'lotona boy and taught him to perform the same feats as themselves; but when he grew up they sent him back to his people to tell of their power. The boy's name was Migina, "Singing," because he never ate, but lived by singing only; he could vanish into the air under the eyes of the onlookers. He did not remain with the T'lotona, but returned to the *Dishinni* as soon as he had displayed his powers.

The raids of the Cree seem to have continued down to about the middle of the nineteenth century, fifty years after the establishment of the post at McLeod lake. The Sekani, like the Blackfoot and other tribes, dreaded their medicine power almost as much as their raids. They relate the following story.

An early factor at Fort McLeod named McIntosh had two wives, one a Cree woman, the other a Carrier from Stuart lake. His Cree wife bore him one son. When the boy was eight years old McIntosh hired a Sekani Indian to perform some work at the post during the spring. The Indian was lazy, and instead of working went down to Trout lake to fish with his brother Kłezuye, but fell sick there and died. Kłezuye went back to McLeod lake, and asked the factor for some blankets so that he might bury his brother in proper state; but McIntosh refused, stating, very imprudently, that the man had been such a worthless fellow, that he himself had caused his death through evil medicine. Kłezuye returned to Trout lake brooding over McIntosh's remarks. Three days later he secretly re-ascended Crooked river to McLeod lake and awaited an opportunity to take vengeance.

Now every morning McIntosh's wives used to go out in a canoe to set a fish-net. As Kłezuye watched them he prayed his dream-guardian, the beaver, to fill the factor with its own restless and sleepless nature in springtime. His prayer was answered. One morning McIntosh went out of his store and told his wives that he himself would set the net and take his boy with him. They set the net at the mouth of Carp Lake creek and paddled back toward the fort. As they were passing the rancherie the boy saw Kłezuye aiming his gun at them and shouted a warning to his father. The Indian fired immediately, and the two bullets with which

he had loaded his gun struck McIntosh under the arm. The factor leaped forward, fell overboard, and was drowned, while his murderer fled around the back of the rancherie to the mouth of Pack river, where he had left his canoe, and paddled up to the factor's store as though he had just returned from Trout lake. As he loitered around the store the boy recognized him and pointed him out to his father's wives. They did not dare to shoot him, but two days later, when he left with other Sekani for the hunting grounds, the Cree woman bent two sticks into the shape of half-moons, cut four human figures in a blanket, and arranged the six objects in a line; then, with her son and fellow-wife, she hurried away to Stuart lake. On the trail she met a friend, and warned him not to go near the trading post on McLeod lake; but he disregarded the warning, stayed a few hours at the post and continued down Pack river to his fellow countrymen. Soon his legs swelled so greatly that he died within a few hours, and more than half the Sekani perished in the same way. Thus the Cree woman avenged her husband.

After the middle of the nineteenth century peace reigned in the Sekani country. The surrounding tribes, greatly reduced in numbers, had become outwardly Europeanized, and were more concerned in protecting their own territories from the encroachments of white settlers, traders, and prospectors, than in raiding their neighbours. The Sekani too changed. They adopted European clothing and weapons, abandoned their temporary lodges of brush or skins in favour of permanent cabins, and took on the externals of the new civilization that approached them from every quarter. The laws of the white man extended everywhere, and the tribes could wander freely into the territories of their former enemies. The Sekani did wander, some down Peace river to the settlements of the Beaver, others west to the Carrier of Stuart and Babine lakes and to the Gitksan of Skeena river. A few settled in those places, others returned with alien wives; but the majority of the Sekani kept themselves isolated in their old haunts, losing more and more their ancient customs and beliefs under the influence of the missionaries and traders.

## CHAPTER IV

## PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND MATERIAL CULTURE

Mackenzie has left the following description of the Sekani whom he met at the headwaters of Parsnip river:<sup>1</sup>

"They are low in stature, not exceeding five feet six or seven inches; and they are of that meagre appearance which might be expected of a people whose life is one succession of difficulties, in procuring subsistence. Their faces are round, with high cheek bones; and their eyes, which are small, are of a dark brown colour; the cartilage of their nose is perforated, but without any ornaments suspended from it; their hair is of a dingy black, hanging loose and in disorder over their shoulders, but irregularly cut in the front, so as not to obstruct the sight; their beards are eradicated, with the exception of a few straggling hairs, and their complexion is a swarthy yellow. . . . (The women) are in general of a more lusty make than the other sex, and taller in proportion, but infinitely their inferiors in cleanliness. A black artificial stripe crosses the face beneath the eye, from ear to ear, which I first took for scabs, from the accumulation of dirt on it. Their hair, which is longer than that of the men, is divided from the forehead to the crown, and drawn back in long plaits behind the ears."

The Sekani of the present day resemble in height the nearest Carriers, males averaging 169.3 cm., females 157.8 cm. Both tribes are slightly taller than the coastal tribes of British Columbia, from whom the Sekani differ also by their narrowness of head and sparseness of build, the latter a consequence, probably, of their more active life, and greater privations.<sup>2</sup> The narrowness of the head causes a lower cephalic index, bringing the Sekani into the sub-brachycephalic group; the figures are males 79.3, females 79.2. The combination of narrow head and lean features makes the cheek-bones appear unusually outstanding, although actually both the breadth and length of the face seem to differ little from those of tribes to the westward. The nasal indices were, males 70.7, females 71.6, figures slightly lower than those given for coast tribes, through a reduction, apparently, in the breadth of the nose; but in this case a comparison with the measurements of another observer is unsatisfactory because of differences in technique and the difficulty of determining the nasion in living subjects.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie, Sir Alexander: *Voyages from Montreal through the Continent of North America to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans in 1789 and 1793*; London, 1801, pp. 204ff.

<sup>2</sup> Many of the Fort Grahame Sekani in 1924 were distinctly undernourished, and suffering from skin and eye diseases.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed figures of Sekani measurements and a comparison with the Beaver, Chipewyan, and Cree Indians, are given by Professor J. C. Boileau Grant, in Bulletin 81 of the National Museum of Canada. For the statements in this paragraph I have compared my own measurements (in Grant's report just mentioned) with those given by Dr. Franz Boas for the coast tribes in "The North-Western Tribes of Canada," Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1898, pp. 628-683.

The eyes vary from dark brown to medium brown, and occasionally show the epicanthic fold. The hair is black, and either straight or with low waves. Formerly men as well as women often parted it in the middle and sometimes plaited it into two braids. The southern Sekani state that after the establishment of the trading posts on McLeod lake some of the men shaved the crown of the head and painted it with red ochre;<sup>1</sup> but the Sekani of the Finlay River basin claim that this practice was restricted to old women. The Tahltan painted only the parting of the hair with red ochre, according to some notes by the late James Teit, and the Carrier seem not to have painted the head at all. At the present time the men trim their hair with scissors, and either eradicate their beards, as in Mackenzie's day, or shave with European razors; in any case their beards are scanty. The women still part the hair in the middle, but usually leave it unbraided, except the women of the Long Grass band, who, being in close contact with the Gitksan and Tahltan Indians, pay more attention to its dressing and braid it with multi-coloured ribbons. Short hair being considered a disgrace except in widows, the girls of this band rub their heads with a preparation of roasted wild celery or parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) mixed with fat taken from the head of the mountain sheep. The Gitksan Indians of upper Skeena river, and the neighbouring Carrier, use the same preparation, but with bear fat substituted for mountain sheep fat; they claim it not only foment the growth of the hair, but lightens its colour.

#### DRESS

Both sexes have long since adopted European clothing, and retain of their old dress only the moccasins and mittens. Mackenzie describes the ancient costume as follows:

"Their dress consists of robes made of the skins of the beaver, the ground hog, and the reindeer, dressed in the hair, and of the mooseskin without it. All of them are ornamented with a fringe, while some of them have tassels hanging down the seams; those of the ground hog are decorated on the fur side with the tails of the animals, which they do not separate from them. Their garments they tie over the shoulders, and fasten them around the middle with a belt of green skin, which is as stiff as horn. Their leggings are long, and, if they were topped with a waistband, might be called trousers; they, as well as their shoes, are made of dressed moose, elk, or reindeer skin. The organs of generation they leave uncovered.

"The women differ little in their dress from the men, except in the addition of an apron, which is fastened round the waist, and hangs down to the knees.

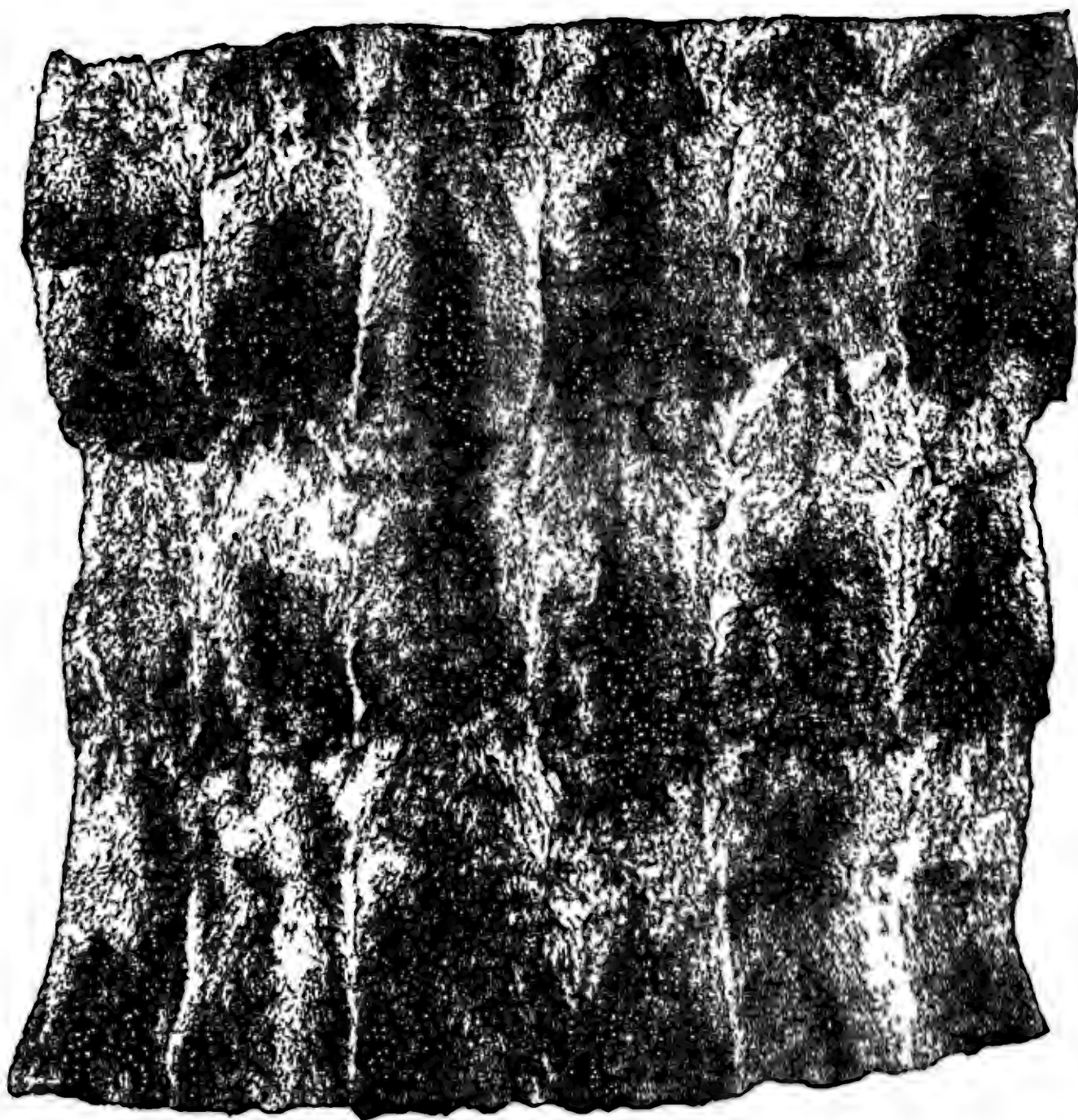
"They have a brown kind of earth in great abundance, with which they rub their clothes, not only for ornament but utility, as it prevents the leather from becoming hard after it has been wetted."

<sup>1</sup> The Carrier report the same practice among the Beaver Indians.



This description probably applies to the summer costume only. Mackenzie's robe was perhaps the sleeveless shirt (*gassue'*), laced together at the shoulder and fastened around the waist with a belt. Sleeves were added later, and some of the natives attached two strings to the bottom which they passed between the legs and tied around the waist; but at an

PLATE V



75944

A Sekani robe of groundhog skins.

early date they adopted the moose-skin breechclout (*tson* or *entsat*) of the eastern tribes. The women seem to have lengthened the shirt, first to the knees, then to the ankles; and they replaced the short skirt (*chaka*) with a European petticoat. The commonest material for shirts was moose or caribou hide, though other skins were employed on occasion, such as

lynx, beaver, and mountain goat. Fort McLeod natives speak of loon-skin shirts among the neighbouring Carrier Indians of Stuart lake, but deny their use by any Sekani band.

In cold weather both sexes threw over the shirt a rectangular robe (*tsede'*) of groundhog or woven rabbit skins, fastening it over one shoulder and drawing it in at the waist with a belt. Some of the best hunters had robes of marten fur, but they disappeared as soon as marten fur became commercially valuable. The groundhog robe, though no longer worn on the person, survives as a sleeping robe or covering for a bed. An average specimen 5 feet by 6 feet, such as that shown in Plate V, contains about twenty-four skins arranged in parallel rows, trimmed to fit and sometimes roughly matched for colour.

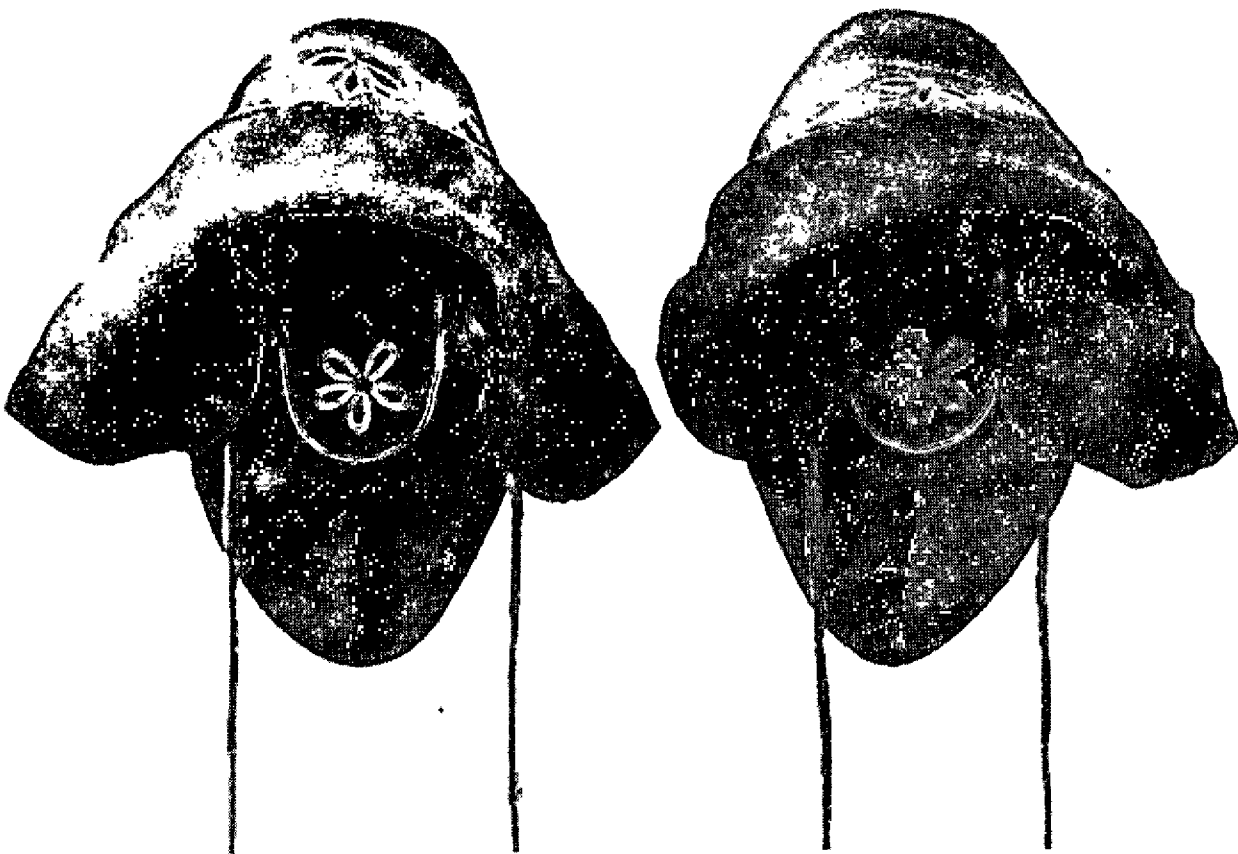
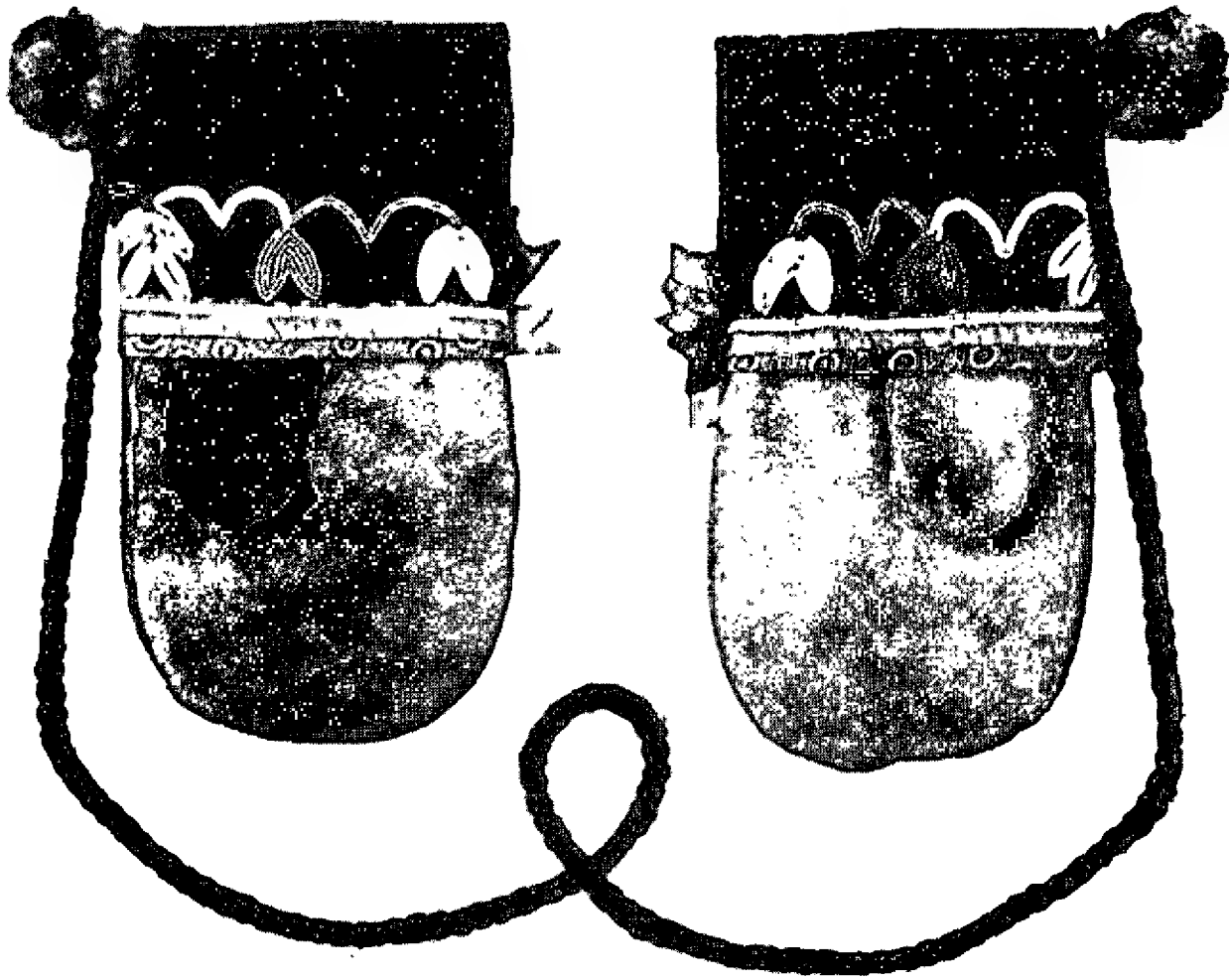
Leggings (*esle*) were generally of caribou hide. Those of the men reached to the thighs, and the narrowed upper ends tucked into the belt; but women's leggings barely reached the knees.

Moccasins (*ke*) were generally made of moose or caribou hide, but sometimes of the more lasting beaver skin. The Sekani of the Parsnip and Finlay River basins wore inside them socks of groundhog or rabbit fur, but the Long Grass people are said to have made the feet of double thickness and dispensed with socks. Five pairs of moose-hide moccasins collected at McLeod lake and at Fort Grahame in 1924 all conform to exactly the same pattern (Plate VI). They are of three pieces, a bottom or foot, a tongue, and an ankle flap. A T-shaped seam runs up the back from below the heel, and a straight seam from the bottom of the tongue to a little under the toes. The rounded tongue extends down to about the base of the toes, and its visible edge is outlined with two rather fine strands of coloured horse-hair, substituted for the older moose-hair or porcupine quills. Overlying the tongue is a false tongue, in two specimens of smoked moose-hide, in the other three of coloured cloth; on this are floral designs worked in beads or silk. A band of coloured cloth conceals the seam uniting the flap with the bottom piece. This flap, which extends about half-way up the leg, is kept in position by two rawhide laces whose ends are sewn (in one case knotted through a hole) on each side of the moccasin about the junction of flap, tongue, and bottom piece. Most of the sewing has been done with sinew, but the cloth is attached with cotton thread.

In winter both sexes wore round caps (*tsa'*) of various furs, beaver, marten, fisher, groundhog, etc. Among the Long Grass Indians half a century ago the caps of the women were shaped like bonnets, fitting around the neck, whereas men's caps, made of beaver skin or from the paws of the lynx, merely covered the top of the head; whether this applied also to the main Sekani bands I do not know. A man who had acquired "medicine power" through some animal often wore a cap made from its fur, especially when going to war; or he would attach to his cap the tail of the animal, or a tail feather from his bird "medicine," to ensure good luck.

Mittens (*bat*), like other parts of the costume, were of various skins, that of the moose being preferred. The majority are now stitched with





European thread on a sewing machine, and ornamented with beaded designs that are predominantly floral (Plate VI). Some natives even prefer gloves, which they make themselves or purchase from the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Sekani never practised tattooing, apparently, nor could any of the living natives recall the black stripe painted across the face beneath the eyes that Mackenzie noticed in the women. They remembered, however, that both men and women daubed red ochre mixed with fat over the cheeks, and often rubbed off portions of the ochre to leave some fantastic design, of no set pattern, but pleasing to the whim of the wearer.

Of their ornaments Mackenzie says:

"They have also a few white beads, which they get where they procure their iron: they are from a line to an inch in length and are worn in their ears, but are not of European manufacture. These, with bracelets made of horn and bone, compose all the ornaments which decorate their persons. Necklaces of the grizzly or white bear's claws, are worn exclusively by the men."

The white beads, of course, were dentalia shells, obtained through Carrier and Gitksan natives from the coast; they were worn both in the ears and noses. Other ornaments worn by western tribes, such as anklets and cedar-bark necklaces, were not adopted by the Sekani; nor did they sprinkle their heads with eagle-down at dances, though both sexes planted the white plumes of the eagle in their hair.

#### DWELLINGS

Both in the Parsnip and Finlay River basins the Sekani lived originally in conical lodges covered with spruce bark, for which in post-European times they often substituted moose-skins. Morice has described their dwellings thus:

"The habitations of the Tse'kehne, whether in winter or in summer, are built after the eastern or conical model. Four long poles with forking extremities are set up one against another, the lower ends of which form on the ground a square on the dimensions of which will depend the size of the lodge. A score or so of other poles are then set up in a circle, the top of each resting on the point of intersection of the first four. In winter, small fascines of spruce are laid horizontally all around the lower perimeter of this frame, so as to leave as few points of access as possible for the cold air from underneath the outer covering, which is then wrapped around the cone resulting from the converging poles. This covering consists of dressed moose skins sewn together, and its perpendicular edges correspond to the entrance of the lodge. They are either buttoned or clasped together from four to five feet above the ground up to the top. On one side of the opening thereby produced is sewn a smaller skin, which forms the door. Two sticks attached transversely thereto on the inside give it the requisite consistency, while the upper one, which slightly projects beyond the edge

of the skin door, serves as a latch, its projecting end being, when necessary, fastened with a string to the adjoining part of the lodge covering. The smoke escapes through the interstices between the converging poles left uncovered at the top. To guard against snow, rain, or adverse winds, an additional piece of skin is sewn on the outside from the apex of the conical covering down to some distance, while its free side is secured to a long pole planted in the ground close by. This appendage is utilized as a shutter wherewith the top opening of the lodge is partially or entirely covered, as the state of the weather may suggest . . . . Summer and winter,

## PLATE VII



60678

Rude dwelling of poles and spruce bark, Fort McLeod. Between the two Sekani women is the wife of a Kentucky trapper who spent the winter of 1923-4 on Misinchinka river.

the fire is started right in the centre, and, instead of the wooden tripod used among the Blackfeet to suspend their kettles, the Tse'kehne prefer a stick reaching horizontally at the proper distance above the fire to two opposite poles of the frame to which it is fastened."<sup>1</sup>

This was the typical winter dwelling, though it was used in summer also. At that season, however, the Sekani often contented themselves with crude wind-breaks of the same conical shape, but covered with spruce bark, hides, or boughs to a height of only 4 or 5 feet, leaving the top quite open. Most, if not all, the Indians now have cloth tents, but similar shelters may still be seen among the neighbouring Beaver of Hudson Hope.

<sup>1</sup> Morice, Rev. A. G.: Notes on the Western Dénés; Trans. Can. Inst., vol. IV, 1892-93, p. 192f.

Quite as common, perhaps, as the conical summer wind-break was the simple lean-to, constructed by planting three or four sticks in line at an angle of about 50 degrees and covering them with spruce bark, boughs, or hides.

In 1924 there were several wooden houses, frame or log, at both McLeod lake and Fort Grahame. At the former place there was also a rectangular lodge of poles whose walls and roof were covered with spruce bark. The sheathing extended over the lower half of the walls only, the upper parts being left open (Plate VII).

The furniture inside these dwellings was naturally meagre. Mackenzie sums it up thus:

"Their kettles are also made of watape (woven spruce roots), which is so closely woven that they never leak, and they heat water in them, by putting red-hot stones into it. There is one kind of them, made of spruce-bark, which they hang over the fire, but at such a distance as to

PLATE VIII



75941

Wooden spoon and a skin scraper made from the shoulder-bone of a moose.

receive the heat without being within reach of the blaze; a very tedious operation. They have various dishes of wood and bark; spoons of horn and wood, and buckets; bags of leather and net-work, and baskets of bark, some of which hold their fishing-tackle, while others are contrived to be carried on the back."

In post-European times the Sekani substituted birch bark for spruce bark in their cooking vessels and baskets, although, unlike the Beaver Indians, they never replaced their spruce-bark canoes with birch-bark ones. For torches they used bundles of jackpine twigs instead of rolls

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie: *Op. cit.*, pp. 206-7.

of birch bark, lighting their fires, like all the northern Indians, with pyrites. They had four ways of cooking meat and fish: boiling in spruce-bark (later birch-bark) baskets over a slow fire; boiling in similar baskets, or in baskets woven from spruce roots, by means of hot stones; roasting on spits; and drying in the smoke of a fire.

None of the old spruce-bark or spruce-root baskets survive today, but the Sekani still make a few birch-bark baskets like the one shown in Plate XIII. This is a well-made specimen, neatly stitched up the sides and around the reinforced rim with spruce roots. The only decorations are two narrow lines of black horse-hair beaded under the stitching of the rim, and at intervals a false over-stitching with bands of dyed horse-hair.

The spoons of horn have disappeared likewise, but one occasionally sees wooden spoons, like the specimen in Plate VIII, some of whose handles are rudely serrated or decorated with hatched lines. Bags of moose-hide are common still; there are rough bags closed with draw-strings (Plate IX), used for carrying berries and meat; net bags of babiche (Plate X) and beaded moose-hide bags with flaps that button or tie over (Plate IX), used for all sorts of miscellaneous objects. For cleaning these moose-hides the Sekani employ either a caribou antler, chisel-ended and with serrated edge<sup>1</sup>, or the shoulder-bone of a moose sharpened like a draw-knife (Plate VIII).

Game was scarce during the winter months, so the Sekani gathered in summer a large stock of dried meat and stored it under spruce bark on a platform raised on four posts that had been carefully smoothed to prevent wolverines and other animals from climbing up. For still greater security they sometimes erected these caches, not on posts, but in trees, as described by Morice:

"They erect sorts of scaffoldings immediately against the trunk of a tall tree. . . . These consist of two long, heavy sticks crossed and firmly bound to the trunk of the tree at their point of intersection, while their ends are secured to some stout overhanging branch by means of strong ropes. Rough boards or split sticks are then laid across this frame which form a floor over which the meat or any other eatable is deposited, carefully wrapped over with skins or spruce bark. Even the bear cannot get at those caches without previously demolishing their floor, which is practically impossible."<sup>2</sup>

At McLeod lake and at Fort Grahame the Sekani have now erected miniature storehouses on posts (Plate II). These are apparently modified forms of their earlier caches, which may still persist away from the settlements.

The Long Grass Indians cooked their food in the same manner as the rest of the Sekani, but also practised other methods which they learned, apparently, from the Gitksan and Tahltan. Thus they sometimes boiled their meat in wooden boxes with hot stones, like the coast tribes; and at

<sup>1</sup> Morice: *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 197.





other times they heated some stones in a small trench, laid fireweed leaves above them, the meat on the leaves, a covering of bark above the meat, and finally hot ashes. Hunters away from camp occasionally boiled their meat in the stomach of a mountain goat by encompassing its upper edge with a green twig and filling this novel bag with water.

In their caches, too, the Long Grass people displayed more variety than their fellow tribesmen. Although they preferred to store their meat on wooden platforms raised on posts or fastened in trees, the absence of trees throughout much of the Groundhog country often forced them to build high platforms of stones. Hunters who intended to return for their meat within a few days piled it on the ground and covered it with a blanket; placed it in crude hampers made of interlaced willow boughs concealed under a layer of brush; or merely set a burning log beside it and set a few traps.

#### TOOLS AND WEAPONS

The old tools and weapons have long since passed out of use. Even in Mackenzie's day they had been modified through the infiltration of iron from the Pacific coast.

"Their arms consist of bows made of cedar, six feet in length, with a short iron spike at one end, and serve occasionally as a spear. Their arrows are well made, barbed, and pointed with iron, flint, stone, or bone; they are feathered, and from two to two feet and a half in length. They have two kinds of spears, but both are double edged, and of well polished iron; one of them is about twelve inches long, and two wide; the other about half the width, and two-thirds of the length; the shafts of the first are eight feet in length, and the latter six. They have also spears made of bone. Their knives consist of pieces of iron, shaped and handled by themselves. Their adzes are something like our adze, and they use them in the same manner as we employ that instrument. They were, indeed, furnished with iron in a manner that I could not have supposed, and plainly proved to me that their communication with those, who communicate with the inhabitants of the sea coast, cannot be very difficult."<sup>1</sup>

The Carrier, Tahltan, Slave, and perhaps other Athapaskan tribes tipped their bows with stone points, and the Sekani did likewise until they obtained iron from the coast. McLeod Lake natives said that although they preferred cedar for their bows, it was so difficult to obtain that they generally used willow or balsam; and that in shooting they used the Mediterranean grip. Arrows, they added, were made of saskatoon or birch, those for children being winged with two feathers laid flat, whereas hunters' arrows had three half-feathers set on edge and fastened down with spruce gum and sinew. The same natives have a tradition that in war they used a moose-jaw club, and an oblong wooden shield coated on the outside with pitch and pebbles. Morice figures a curious kind of "war or hunting

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie: *Op. cit.*, p. 206.

bow" made of mountain maple, with a wrapping of sinew and a coating of dyed porcupine quills. This was probably a reconstructed weapon specially ornamented, for the Sekani had ceased to use the bow for war, or for large game, fully half a century before his time, although boys retained it for shooting grouse. He illustrates also three types of arrows, a "cut" arrow, a triple-headed arrow, and a blunt arrow, all with triple feathering.<sup>1</sup>

Mackenzie mentions two kinds of spears that differed only in size; both had iron blades. McLeod Lake natives say that bear hunters used a stone-headed lance, whereas beaver hunters used a toggled spear with a triple-barbed head of bone, antler, or simply hard wood. A sketch of the latter weapon, drawn from their description, is shown in Figure 2.

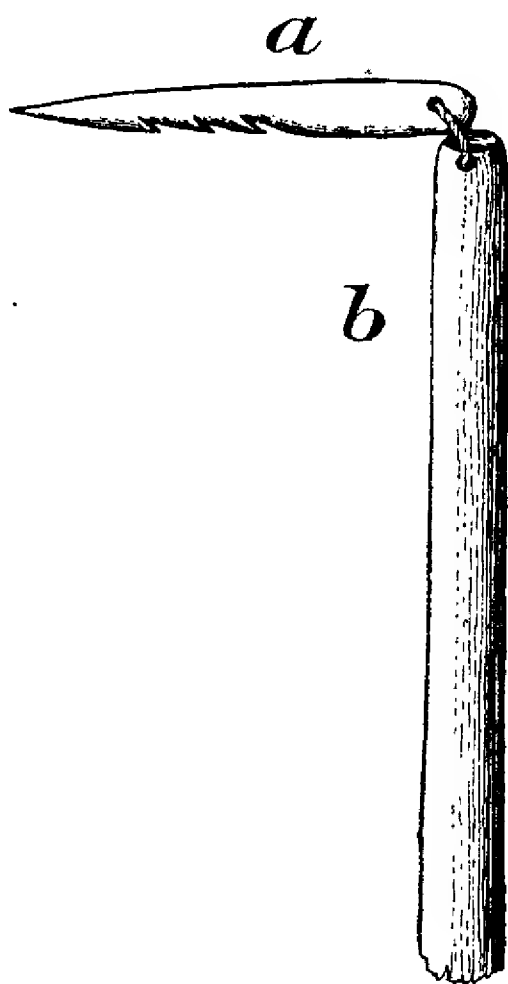


Figure 2. Sketch of a Sekani beaver spear.

Fishermen had three-pronged leisters with bone points for spearing fish at night from their canoes by the light of jackpine torches. In winter they dug holes through the ice with chisels of moose or caribou antler mounted on long wooden handles, cleared away the snow from the holes to leave only transparent ice, and, lying under brush shelters, used these same leisters to stab the fish that approached their lures; or else they hooked the fish with long gaffs. During the months of February and March the Gitk-

<sup>1</sup> Morice: *Op. cit.*, pp. 56-59.



san Indians still use a gaff in this way to catch the steel-head salmon in the shallow upper waters of Kispiox river; for bait they often use only a piece of red flannel, but the Sekani, who caught not salmon but Dolly Varden trout, used bunches of fine sinew. There were also fish-hooks, as mentioned by Mackenzie, "small bones, fixed in pieces of wood split for that purpose, and tied round with fine watape," which were jigged or occasionally set overnight concealed in a wrapping of sinew. The modern Sekani state that their fishing-lines were made of sinew, but Mackenzie speaks of "nets and fishing-lines made of willow-bark and nettles; those made of the latter are finer and smoother than if made with hempen thread."<sup>1</sup>

#### DEADFALLS, SNARES, NETS, AND WEIRS

In fishing and hunting, however, the Sekani relied less on their weapons than on deadfalls, snares, and nets. Deadfalls they still employ occasionally for groundhog, fisher, and marten, in earlier times probably for other animals also. But they procured most of their game, whether groundhogs or moose, with snares. "They have snares made of green skin [babiche], " says Mackenzie," which they cut to the size of sturgeon twine, and twist a certain number of them together, and though when completed they do not exceed the thickness of a cod-line, their strength is sufficient to hold a moose-deer: they are from one and a half to two fathoms in length."<sup>2</sup> A few years after Mackenzie's day Simon Fraser saw the Indians snaring mountain sheep:

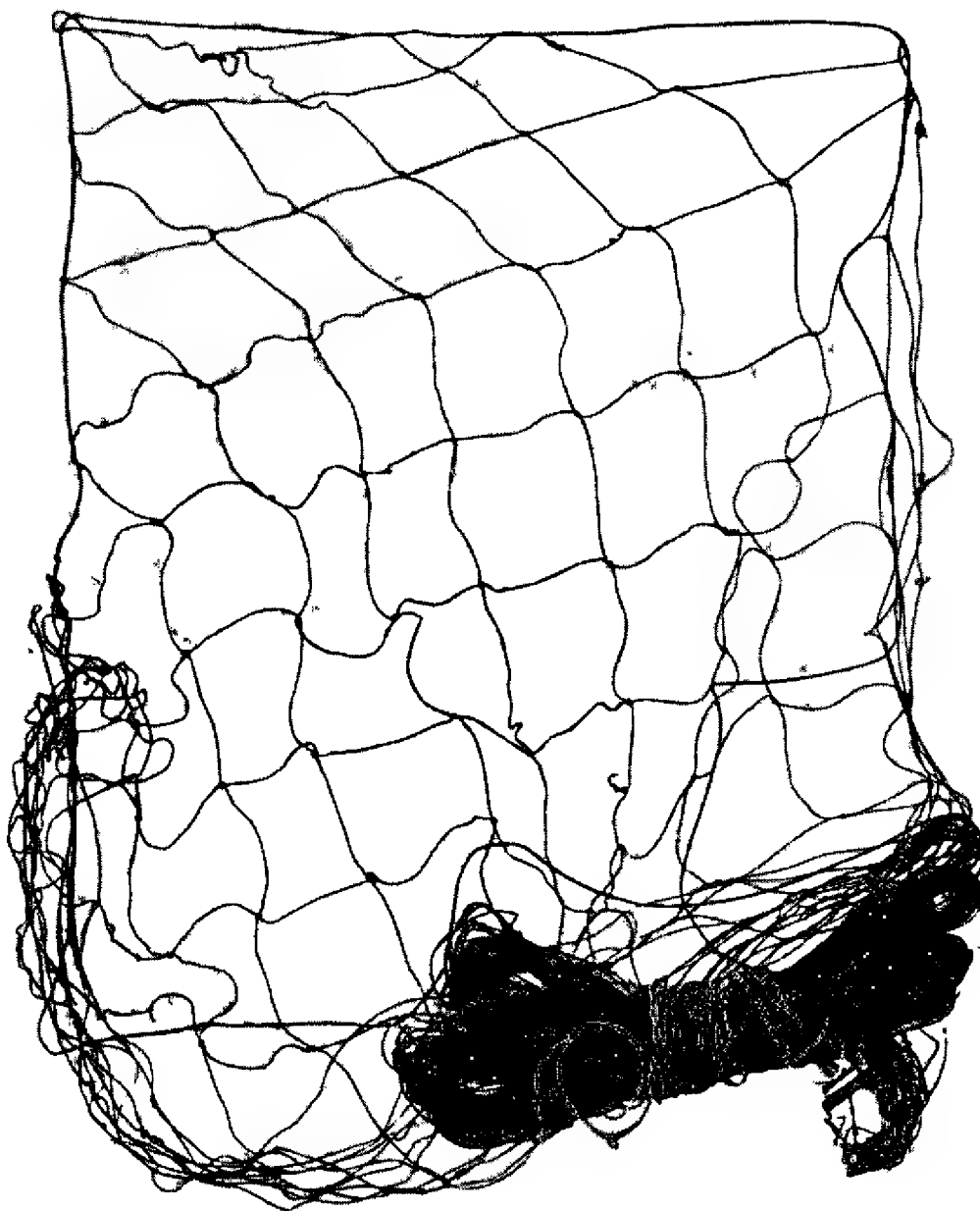
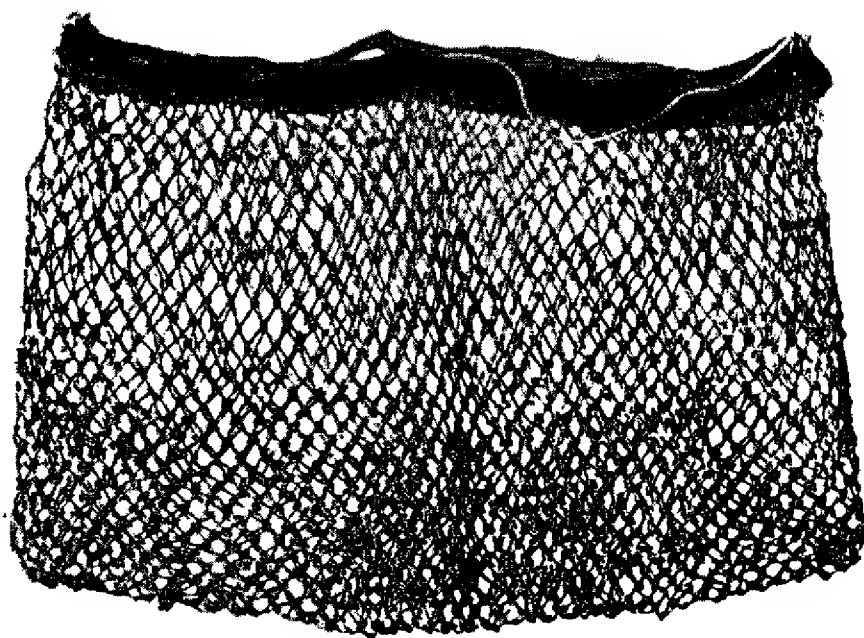
"We were greatly amused looking at some of the [Meadow] Indians running after the wild sheep which they call As-pah. They are really expert, indeed running full speed among the perpendicular rocks which had I not ocular demonstration I could never believe to have been trained by any creature either of the human or brute creation for the rocks appeared to us which perhaps might be exaggerated a little from the distance to be as steep as a wall and yet while in pursuit of the sheep they bounded from one to another with the swiftness of a Roe, and at last killed two in their snares."<sup>2</sup>

The bear and the moose, of course, required much stronger snares than the rabbit and grouse, and the Sekani probably set their nooses in two or three different ways. By constructing long fences of brush, and setting snares at intervals of a few feet or yards, the Indians captured whole flocks of grouse, and whole herds of caribou, as explained by Morice:

"The Sékanais...previously set in a continuous line 40 or 50 moose hide snares in suitable defiles or passes in the mountains frequented by the animals. Two of the most active hunters are then deputed to watch at either end of the line, after which the hunters, who usually number fif-

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie: *Op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> *First Journal of Simon Fraser: Op. cit.*, May 26, 1806.



75943

A babiche hunting bag, and a babiche net for catching beaver.

teen or more, drive the band of deer or cariboo to where the snares are set and, by loud shouting and firing of guns, they scare and thereby force the reluctant game to pass through the noose which at once contracts around their necks. The deer immediately scamper away with the movable sticks, to which the snares are attached, and which, being soon caught among fallen or standing trees or other obstacles, cause the caught animal to stop suddenly with the result of being strangled to death in a short time."<sup>1</sup>

The Sekani caught large numbers of groundhogs during the summer months, most of them with snares. Mackenzie saw a "kind of wooden trap, in which, as our guide informed me, the groundhog is taken";<sup>2</sup> but the present day natives seem to have forgotten it. They did, however, kill many of these animals with sticks, after smoking them out of their

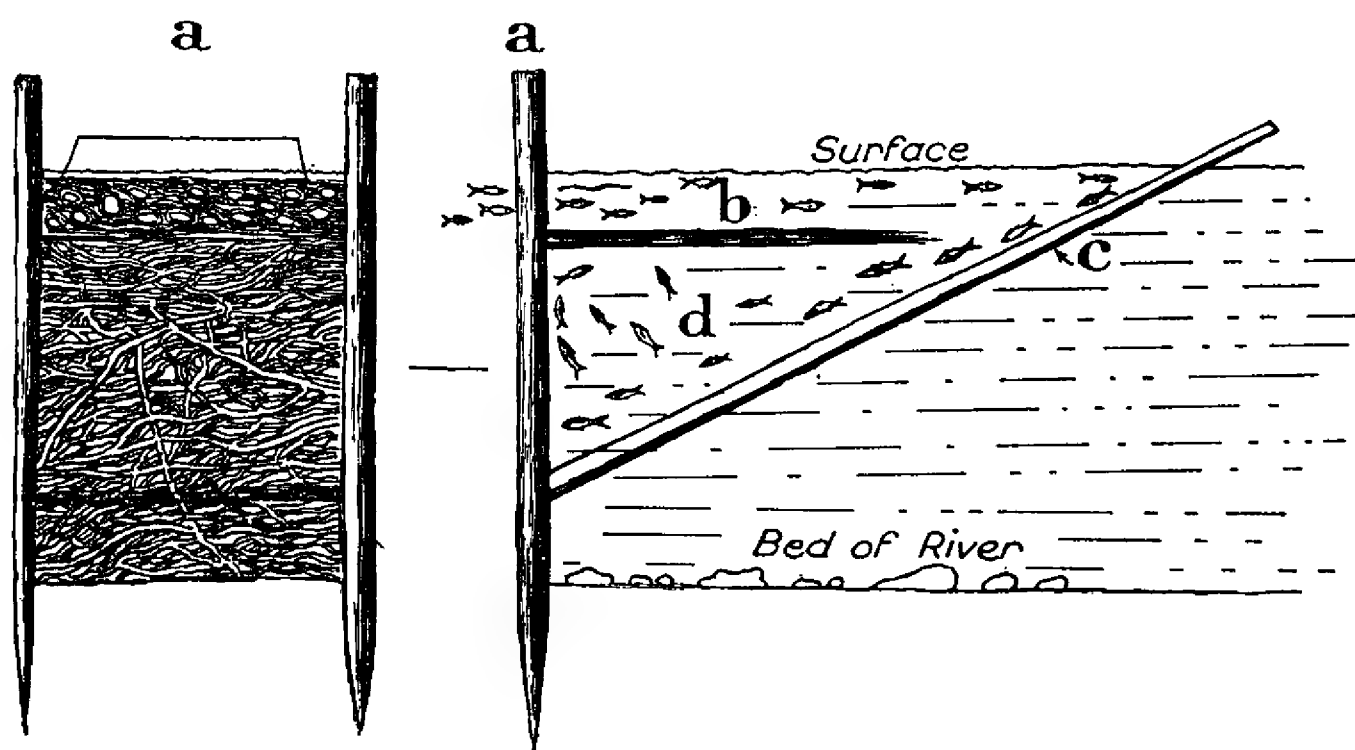


Figure 3. Sketch of a fish-weir.

- (a) Fence of brush across a stream with gaps in the top.
- (b) Horizontal platform of small saskatoon branches, closely laced together just below the surface of the water with the sharp points facing downstream.
- (c) Sloping floor of poles, one end of which is above water.
- (d) The sluice-box in which the fish are trapped.

holes or flooding them out by diverting a stream; and if the groundhogs retreated into crannies among the rocks they twisted long sticks in their fur and pulled them out into the open. Beaver they generally caught, and still catch, in nets of babiche, for they only used the spears described a page or two earlier when they broke down the animals' houses. Plate X shows an ordinary beaver net; its dimensions are given by Morice:

"Both hands outstretched with the thumbs tip to tip are the standard measure for the width of the beaver net. Large nets require twelve such units, while the smaller ones have only nine or thereabouts. Such nets never exceed twenty-five feet in length."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Morice: *Op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Mackenzie: *Op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>3</sup> Morice: *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

The Sekani had also fishing-nets, which they made of nettle fibres or willow roots and used both summer and winter, setting them in winter under the ice. In recent years they have learned from their Carrier neighbours to make fish-traps, which they did not use in earlier times, although in small streams they were accustomed to set up weirs of brush that intercepted the fish, and constructed also the sluice-box shown diagrammatically in Figure 3.

#### TRANSPORTATION

Toboggans came into use, apparently, only in modern times; previously the Sekani carried all their possessions on their backs during the winter months. They did, however, possess snow-shoes, which were rare or unknown among their Carrier neighbours. Plate XIII shows a specimen that came from the Long Grass band, though it was obtained at Hazelton; but whether it correctly reproduces the ancient type is not certain, for today snow-shoes are freely traded throughout northern British Columbia and the Indians often imitate foreign models.

For summer travelling the Sekani had canoes of spruce bark which have been described by Mackenzie:

"The bark is taken off the tree the whole length of the intended canoe, which is commonly about eighteen feet, and is sewed with watape at both ends; two laths are then laid, and fixed along the edge of the bark which forms the gunwale; in these are fixed the bars, and against them bear the ribs or timbers, that are cut to the length to which the bark can be stretched; and, to give additional strength, strips of wood are laid between them; to make the whole watertight, gum is abundantly employed. These vessels carry from two to five people. Canoes of a similar construction were used by the Beaver Indians within these few years, but they now very generally employ those made of the bark of the birch tree, which are by far more durable. Their paddles are about six feet long, and about one foot is occupied by the blade, which is in the shape of an heart."<sup>1</sup>

There is no record of the Sekani substituting birch bark for spruce bark in their canoes, nor any memory of birch-bark boats among the present inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Today they use either Peterborough canoes, or crude dugouts of cottonwood like those of the Carrier and Gitksan. After trimming the log to shape they hollow it out with fire and adzes, then spread the gunwales with wedges of graduated length, first softening the wood by filling the canoe with water. The final wedges become the thwarts, which number from four to six according to the length of the boat (Plate XI). The paddles are crudely shaped, and seldom used on the swiftly flowing rivers, where more progress can be made by poling.

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie: *Op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Fraser speaks of pine canoes on upper Parsnip river, but almost certainly he means spruce (First Journal, June 7, 1806).

The Long Grass Indians used both spruce-bark canoes and dugouts. In emergencies, also, they used a covering of moose hides instead of spruce bark, like the Tahltan Indians, or built a crude raft.

PLATE XI



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A dugout canoe at Fort McLeod.

## CHAPTER V

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

In the earliest times of which we have record the Sekani were divided into bands, each of which possessed its own hunting territory. Sometimes the individual families scattered and hunted separately, sometimes they wandered in groups of two or three; yet just as frequently, perhaps, they held together for mutual support and moved as a unit from one place to another within their domain. There were no family hunting grounds, no districts of which a family or small group of families claimed exclusive possession. Family rights to special hunting grounds have come only in recent times, after the fur trade induced the Indian to return year after year to the same trapping district and to conserve its supply of beaver. Even today the change from band to family ownership of districts is not complete; the entire band claims the final possession of every district within its area, and if for any reason one family fails to occupy its usual trapping ground another does not hesitate to take its place.

Each band had a leader, who was neither hereditary nor elected, but acquired his position through force of character, skill in hunting, and sane judgment. His authority, therefore, was merely nominal; he was a leader, not a chief, and if he presumed to issue orders, he had no means of enforcing them. When the hunters discussed their affairs over the evening fires and laid their plans for the morrow, the voice of the leader carried more weight, but no more actual authority, than that of the youth who had just entered the ranks of manhood. At any time a new leader might arise to supersede him, and his influence inevitably waned with advancing years. Parties that separated off from the band to fish, to hunt, or to raid neighbouring tribes selected their own leaders.

The only laws, therefore, were the regulations prescribed by custom. Since every family was coequal with every other, and often depended on its neighbours for support, it was necessary to consider all food as common property whenever two or more families lived side by side. The hunter who killed an animal useful for food would not even retain its hide, but presented it to some other man in the camp, lest he should be accused of unsociability and niggardliness. The only exception was the skin of the groundhog, because it had little or no value. He might retain the skins of animals whose meat was useless, such as the marten, fisher, and fox, though even these he often gave away to relatives. After the establishment of the fur trade, with its totally different estimate on the value of skins, the Sekani ceased to give away the furs of the beaver and lynx, and many of them now retain also the hides of the caribou and moose. The old regulations, however, prevented a family from amassing any of the

necessities of life at the expense of other families, preserved their social equality, and provided for those who were unfortunate, in so far as they could be provided for under the harsh conditions of a wandering life.

Lacking definite chiefs, or a council, to maintain law and order and to regulate the actions of the individual families, the Sekani had no recourse but the blood-feud to check murder and other serious crimes. Each band was small and its members closely related, so that feuds within a band seem to have been much rarer than feuds with neighbouring bands or with the Carrier and other tribes on their borders. The Sekani ascribed most deaths to sorcery, and often sought vengeance on the supposed murderer and his kindred, sometimes even on a totally innocent group. Thus Harmon relates from Stuart lake that:

"A Sicauny has just arrived, who states, that a little this side of McLeod's Lake, where he was encamped with his family, an Indian of the same tribe, rushed out of the wood, and fired upon them, and killed his wife. Her corpse he immediately burned upon the spot; and then, with his son and two daughters, he proceeded directly to this place... All the savages, who have had a near relation killed; are never quiet until they have revenged the death, either by killing the murderer, or some person nearly related to him. This spirit of revenge has occasioned the death of the old woman, above mentioned, and she, undoubtedly deserved to die; for, the last summer, she persuaded her husband to go and kill the cousin of the murderer, and that, merely because her own son had been drowned."<sup>1</sup>

In another passage the same writer mentions that:

"Yesterday, five Sicaunies came here, from McLeod's Lake, who form a small war party. Their leader, or war chief, desired me to allow them to go where they might think proper; upon which I enquired of them, whither they wished to direct their course, and what their business was. The speaker replied, that, when they left their lands, their intention was to go and try to take a scalp or two from the Indians of Frazer's Lake, 'who,' he added, 'have done us no injury. But we have lost a relation; and we must try to avenge his death, on some one.'"<sup>2</sup>

A Fort McLeod native related the following incident which occurred in the time of his grandfather:

"The mother of a Yutuwichan Indian named Gwatcha had a grudge against some Indians of the Tsekani band, and urged her son to shoot them. Gwatcha shot and killed one man, after which his band moved away to fish at Carp lake. A Tsekani man named Nasawaya decided to fish there also and was advised before he left McLeod lake to shoot Gwatcha's mother if any one attacked him, because she was the cause of all the trouble between the two bands. Nasawaya was leaping over a small creek just outside the Yutuwichan camp when some one shot him in the elbow and

<sup>1</sup> Harmon, D. W.: *A Journal of Voyages and Travels*; Andover, 1820, p. 229f.

<sup>2</sup> Harmon: *Op. cit.*, p. 203f., Cf. Morice, A. G.: *History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia*, p. 133 (Toronto, 1904).



knocked his gun from his hands. He picked it up and ran into the woods, but presently circled round the camp and shot Gwatcha's mother dead. Some Yutuwichan hunters pursued and captured him, but let him go when they discovered who he was, merely saying, 'You did right, but you had better avoid our people.' So Nasawaya fled to another district.

"Gwatcha's father had been sitting beside his wife when she was shot, but could not pursue the murderer because he had taken his gun apart to clean it. By the time he had put it together and followed his companions Nasawaya was far away. Four years later the two men met at McLeod lake, where some of the Yutuwichan Indians were gambling with the Tsekani. His daughter said to him 'There is Nasawaya, who shot our mother. Are you not going to kill him?' Her father tore his clothes at the knees, took up his gun and knife, and, stealing behind the circular wind-break of spruce-bark within which the people were gambling, stabbed Nasawaya between the shoulders. Then he ran toward the woods, while the gamblers scattered to their lodges. But Nasawaya snatched up his gun, knocked down a woman who tried to hinder him, and shot his assailant dead. Then he applied to his wound some medicine bought at the Hudson's Bay Company's store and in a short time was well again."

Feuds of this character were not confined to the Sekani, but common among all the tribes of the Mackenzie River basin. There was no chief or council to suppress them, and the spiritual dangers that the Indians associated with manslaughter were too slight to be an effective deterrent. The Sekani believed, for example, that if a man failed to tear his clothes at the knees before slaying an enemy he would fall sick afterwards and die. After the slaying he should arch a stick in front of a fire and, kneeling before it, let the heat strike his body under the arch; otherwise he would fall sick, have bad luck in his hunting, or meet with some other misfortune. For the same reason, before crossing a stream or a river, he should break off the top of a spruce tree and carefully step over it; and he should smoke, not a European pipe, which would cause his throat to swell and make him short of breath, but a pipe whose stem was fashioned from a twig of saskatoon or red willow, split, hollowed out, and bound together again. The pipe or cup of a man who had slain a woman seemed to the Sekani so tainted that no one else dared to touch it. Nevertheless, all these penalties were evidently too trifling to carry any weight, and even the fear of a blood-feud has seldom checked murder in regions, such as northern Canada, where the population was sparse and weakly organized.

When the Sekani were confined to the western side of the Rockies through the hostility of the Beaver and Cree they impinged continuously against the Gitksan and Carrier Indians, who were organized in the complex manner so characteristic of the Pacific coast. The Sekani not only fought, traded, and intermarried with them, but assimilated many of their customs and tried to adopt their divisions into exogamous matrilinear phratries. The two bands that centred around McLeod lake, the Tsekani and the Yutuwichan, naturally copied the Carrier of Stuart lake who were



their nearest neighbours; the Sasuchan band that frequented Bear lake and the Finlay River basin imitated the Carrier of Babine lake and the Gitksan whom they met at Fort Connolly. Thus certain divergencies in organization between the Carrier and Gitksan became reflected in the Sekani also, so that the system adopted at McLeod lake was not identical with that of their kinsmen on Finlay river.

Actually the McLeod Lake Indians remember very little about the phratries they adopted, because in the general decline of native customs that followed the advent of the fur trade and the subsequent colonization they abandoned the system before it had time to establish itself. They say that the Carrier of Stuart lake had five phratries: *tsayu*, "beaver"; *itsamashu*, *visilyu*, *kwanpahotenne*, and *eske*, the last four names being untranslatable.<sup>1</sup> The Sekani of McLeod lake tried to arrange themselves into similar phratries under chiefs whom they called *Daiyi* (probably the Chinook word *taiyi*: chief), and they even held one or two potlatches to establish the system; but they quickly abandoned the attempt when they discovered that it did not help them under the new conditions of life, and merely provoked the scorn of Europeans. Yet if a McLeod Lake native today visits Stuart lake to take part in any ceremony, the Stuart Lake Carrier consider him to belong to the Tsayu phratry, and would forbid his marriage to a woman of that phratry if their own system had not also broken down during the last fifty years.

The Finlay River Sekani, on the other hand, seem to have been intriguing with the phratric system for nearly a century. They call a phratry *tsinadjinni*, and bestow the title of *teneza'* (a Carrier word for the chief of a phratry, or the chief of a clan within the phratry) on any man who gives a potlatch. *Daiyi* they consider an old word that has no reference to the phratric system but means the leader of a band. They first attempted to establish phratries about 1850, apparently, for an elderly man whom the Hudson's Bay Company now (1924) dignify with the title of "Chief of Fort Grahame" heard from his mother that sixty or seventy years ago some Gitksan Indians from the village of Kispiox visited Bear lake and asked the Sasuchan Sekani to join them in holding a potlatch. At that time the Sekani recognized no phratries, but each man assigned himself for the occasion to the phratry of a Gitksan relative or friend. They then retained these affiliations for a period, but lost them as soon as the Hudson's Bay Company removed its post from Bear lake to Fort Grahame.

<sup>1</sup> This list corresponds closely with that given by Morice except that he omits the fifth phratry *eske*, and translates *kwanpahotenne* as "inhabitants of the fire-side." (Morice, A. G.: Notes on the Western Dénés; Trans. Can. Inst., vol. IV, 1892-3, pp. 203f.) He seems to be mistaken, however, when he states that four phratries (or, as he calls them, *gentes*) obtained among the Carrier. There were five in several districts, and in one, apparently, only two. The following list covers those Carrier groups from which I have specific information:

*Hwittsowitenne* group (around Bulkley river): *tsayu*, *lachsamshu*, *lakselyu*, *gitamtanyu*, and *gilserhyu*.

*Uanwittenne* group (Babine lake): *tsayu*, *lachsamshu*, *kwanpe' hwotenne*, *gitamtanyu*, and *gilserhyu*.

*Nattlewitenne* group (at the east end of Fraser lake): *tsayu*, *itsamashu*, *laksilyu*, *tamtanyu*, and *gilserhyu*.

*Nu'tseni* group (main part of Fraser lake): *tsayu*, *itsamashu*, *visilyu*, *tamtanyu*, and *tsoyetzottenne*.

*Tattcatotenne* group (around Cheslatta lake): *tsayu*, *itsamashu*, *visilyu*, *tamtanyu*, *tsuyezhottenne*.

*Yuta' hwotenne* group (Stony Creek Indians, just south of Vanderhoof): *visilyu* and *gilserhyu* only.

The last twenty-five years have seen their revival, for now many of the Finlay River Sekani are wandering westward again and visiting both the Carrier and the Gitksan Indians around Babine lake and river. They recognize today three phratries, which they call *laksel*, *lachsibu*, and *laksamshu*. *Laksel* is in Gitksan<sup>1</sup> *lakse'l*, the name of the Raven phratry; *laksamshu* (*shu* or *yu* means "people") is the Gitksan *lachsamillich* ("on beaver"), the name of a clan in the Eagle phratry. Their phratric system, therefore, comes from the Gitksan, but owing to Carrier influence is not identical with it; for they have only three phratries against the Gitksan four. But neither is it identical with the Carrier system (itself derived mainly from the Gitksan), for the Carrier have, or had until recently, five phratries. To reconcile these different systems when celebrating a potlatch together the three peoples adopted the following equation:

Sekani		Babine Carrier		Gitksan
<i>laksel</i>	=	<i>gilserhyu</i>	=	<i>lachsels</i> : the Raven phratry
		and		
		<i>kwanpahotenne</i>		
<i>lachsibu</i>	=	<i>Gitamtanyu</i>	=	<i>lachgibu</i> : the Wolf phratry
<i>laksamshu</i>	=	<i>laksamshu</i>	=	<i>giskahast</i> : the Fireweed phratry
		and		and
		<i>tsayu</i>	=	<i>lachskik</i> : the Eagle phratry

These equations, of course, are not arbitrary, but correlate with the principal crests in each phratry. The most important crest in the *lachsels* phratry of the Gitksan is the raven, which is a crest in the *laksilyu* (called *kwanpahotenne* at Babine) phratry of a Carrier group at the eastern end of Fraser lake, but appears nowhere else, apparently, in Carrier territory and was not adopted by the Sekani. However, the next ranking crest in the *lachsels* phratry is the frog or toad, which appears in both the *gilserhyu* and *laksilyu* phratries in many Carrier districts, and is the principal crest of the Sekani *laksel*. Similarly the principal crests of the Gitksan *lachgibu* or Wolf phratry are the wolf and the grizzly bear, and one or other (sometimes both) of these animals is the crest of the *Gitamtanyu* phratry of the Carrier and of the *lachsibu* phratry of the Sekani. The *laksamshu* phratry of the Sekani recognizes as its principal crest the *beaver*, which is a leading crest in the Carrier *tsayu* and in the Gitksan *lachskik* or Eagle phratries. But when the *tsayu* phratry of the western Carriers was decimated by an epidemic about fifty years ago its survivors were absorbed into the *laksamshu* phratry, whose principal crests, sun and moon, are the same as those of the Gitksan *giskahast* or Fireweed phratry. Hence the Sekani *laksamshu* phratry equates with two phratries of the Carrier that are now amalgamated, and with two phratries of the Gitksan that still remain distinct.

Among the Finlay River Sekani the *laksel* phratry, which surpasses the other two in numbers, has adopted the following crests (*nattsi*, which is also the Carrier word for crest): frog or toad, marten, caribou, and beads. At a potlatch any member of the phratry has the right to use one or all of these crests, if he wishes. The crests of the *lachsibu* phratry are

<sup>1</sup> Hazelton dialect.

wolf, grizzly bear, and black bear; and of the *lachsamshu* phratry beaver and owl.

Potlatches, which occur only in June and July when the families gather at Fort Grahame after the winter's trapping, are simple feasts in which the members of the phratry that issues the invitation range themselves at the back of the house and wait on the representatives of the other two phratries, who sit on the floor along the sides. The Sekani do not dramatize their crests, as do the Carrier and Gitksan, no one wears a mask, and no one sings or dances; but they have attempted to introduce some principle into their seating arrangements inasmuch as the leading *teneza'* in each phratry occupies the central place and the other members group near him in the supposed order of their importance. A few men have assumed potlatch names or titles, generally, if not always, during real potlatches at Babine in which Carrier or Gitksan Indians participated. Thus the *laksel* phratry has the titles *daiya*, "he goes towards the moose," and *asbazudi*, "tongue of a mountain goat"; the *lachsamshu* phratry *dzak*, "a beaver-house"; and the *lachsibu datchinkadiye*, "a conspicuous tree." The individual who acquired the title "He goes towards the moose" purchased for his potlatch five cases of eggs, and large quantities of tobacco, canned salmon, milk, and other foods. Since the expense was greater than he could bear alone, his fellow phratrymen shared it with him.

Children belong to the phratries of their mothers, marriage within a phratry is discountenanced, and the phratry of a man (or woman) who dies at Fort Grahame arranges and pays for his burial by one of the other two phratries. During the greater part of the year, however, the families are scattered over a wide range of territory and the phratrie system lapses completely. It really functions, in fact, only during the months of June and July when the people gather at Fort Grahame, though it can be revived at any season of the year by individuals visiting the Carrier and Gitksan. Some of the older people who do not roam outside Sekani territory hardly know to what phratries they belong, and depend for guidance on their kindred.

The T'lotona or Long Grass Indians also adopted a phratrie organization, but they derived their system from the Tahltan and Gitksan rather than from the Gitksan and Carrier. They, too, had<sup>1</sup> three phratries, Raven, Wolf, and Fireweed, as opposed to the Gitksan four, Raven, Wolf, Fireweed, and Eagle, and two, Raven and Wolf, among the Tahltan. Each phratry had its crests which were represented at potlatches by appropriate emblems. The crests of the Raven phratry were, raven, eagle, and frog or toad;<sup>2</sup> those of the Wolf phratry, wolf, black bear, and a small owl;<sup>3</sup> and those of the Fireweed phratry, fireweed, sun or moon, grouse, and the big horned owl.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> About 1900. The condition of the band today is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> The Raven phratry of the Tahltan recognized as its crests raven, eagle, toad, and otter. Raven and frog are the principal crests in the Raven phratry of the Gitksan, and the eagle appears in a modified form, though it is the principal crest in the eagle phratry.

<sup>3</sup> The Wolf phratry of the Tahltan had only one crest, wolf. Wolf and black bear, but apparently not owl, are crests in the Gitksan Wolf phratry.

<sup>4</sup> Fireweed, moon, grouse, and owl are all crests in the Gitksan Fireweed phratry.

At potlatches, particularly at the potlatch to appoint a new chief, members of the Raven phratry attached the beak of a raven to their hats, painted a raven or a toad on their skin robes (or represented it in appliqué on a woollen blanket), and sang:

"Why are you so long in coming?  
You must be crazy.  
Don't you know the feast is ready?  
You have enough to feast on.  
Why delay your coming?

Come on in.  
You act as if insane.  
You have so much to feast on.  
You act as if you were insane."

Similarly the Wolf people, dressed in wolf or black bear skins, planted owl feathers in their hair, and sang:

"Where is the wolf?  
Let him come in.  
Come in quickly."

The Fireweed people covered their heads with fireweed, and, instead of singing, hooted like the big horned owl. Hence a stranger wishing to know the phratric affiliations of a Long Grass Indian would ask "What does he wear on his blanket, a raven, a wolf or fireweed?"

How widely the matrilinear system of society once prevailed throughout the world is much disputed, but today it has entirely disappeared except among a few primitive peoples in out-of-the-way corners. It is, therefore, very instructive to find one of our Canadian Indian tribes deliberately attempting to adopt it, under the influence of neighbouring tribes. Their earlier kinsmen in the Cordillera, the Carriers and the Tahltan, had made the same attempt and succeeded; but we were never able to see the beginnings of the process, or to follow it through all its stages. The McLeod Lake Sekani entered the road sixty or seventy years ago, but turned back. The Long Grass band completed the process, apparently, but the history of this band is obscure and it is fast disintegrating, if it has not already disappeared. The Finlay River Sekani have travelled half the distance. They have set up a phratric system in which descent rigidly follows the female line. But their system now functions for a few weeks only, and the advancing tide of Europeans will surely prevent it from rooting, even if the band maintains its place for another century, as seems most unlikely, and does not melt away as other tribes are melting around them.

## CHAPTER VI

## MARRIAGE, CHILDHOOD, AND BURIAL

The simplicity of Sekani society reveals itself in the kinship system, which is totally unlike the Carrier and Gitksan systems where exogamy and matrilinear descent prevailed. The terms of relationship at Fort Grahame are:<sup>1</sup>

Term	Used by both sexes	Man speaking	Woman speaking
settane	my older or younger brother my male cousin		
hotige	my older brother my older male cousin		
asidle	my younger brother my younger male cousin		my brother's son
se'tise'	my older or younger sister my female cousin		
sāde	my older sister my older cousin		
esdje'	my younger sister my younger female cousin		my brother's daughter
abba	my father		
ane	my mother		
esta	my paternal uncle my step-father		
sase	my maternal uncle		
abedze	my paternal aunt		
songwe	my step-mother		
seskege	my children		
setchwa'	my son, step-son	brother's son	sister's son
setchwe'	my daughter, step-daughter	my brother's daughter	my sister's daughter

<sup>1</sup> At Fort McLeod there are only minute phonetic differences; every syllable in these words is, I believe, high-toned.

Term	Used by both sexes	Man speaking	Woman speaking
sazi		my sister's son my sister's daughter	
ase	my grandfather		
ası	my grandmother		
asa	my grandchild		
ese	my father-in-law		
esı	my mother-in-law		
senaze	my son-in-law		
setcha	my daughter-in-law		
klaze'	my brother-in-law my sister-in-law		

In this system the inclusion of cousins on both the maternal and paternal sides with the siblings, even without other evidence, shows that exogamy with patrilinear or matrilinear descent had no place in Sekani social organization. That a man should call his brother's children his own, and that the same term should mean both paternal uncle and step-father, proves the existence of the levirate, which indeed is attested by the natives themselves. It is only natural, therefore, that a man should have different terms for his sister's children and his brother's children. Marriage with two sisters, or with a deceased's wife's sister, is indicated by the use of the same term for maternal aunt and step-mother, and by a woman calling her sister's children her own. I cannot understand, however, why a woman should apply the same term to her brother's children as to her own brothers and sister.

Marriage among the Sekani was regulated by the degree of consanguinity. First cousins of all kinds, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandparents, and grandchildren were debarred from intermarriage, but there were no restrictions beyond these relationships. Polygamy was not uncommon, often taking the form of a man marrying two sisters. If a wife died, the husband frequently, though not always, married her sister, should there be one unmarried; and if the husband died, his brother married the widow. Morice says that "polyandry was in honour conjointly with polygamy,"<sup>1</sup> but the Sekani themselves state that it occurred only rarely. Wrestling for wives, common among some Athapaskan tribes of the Mackenzie River valley, was unknown.

<sup>1</sup> Morice, A. G.: The Western Dénés; Proc., Can. Inst., Third Series, vol. VII, 1888-89, p. 123.

From Morice, also, comes the following account of a Sekani marriage:

"Among the Sekanais nothing was simpler or more expeditious than the contraction of marriage. Whenever a young hunter had made up his mind on mating a fair child of the forest, with scarcely any previous courting, he would in the day time simply ask the girl of his choice: 'Will you pack my beaver snares for me?' To which, if she refused him, she would make answer: 'No, there are plenty of women, ask another one.' But if agreeable to the maid, she would at once answer without any conventional blushes: 'Perhaps, ask my mother.' Upon which the lad would not ask her mother, but the girl would immediately tell her about it. Then, following her parent's advice, she would hasten to erect

PLATE XII



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Sekani family at Fort McLeod.

a branch lodge alongside their own primitive habitation, and in the evening, the affianced youth (such he was after the proposée's answer) would on entering it hand her his 'Beaver snares.' Without further ceremony, they were man and wife. Supposing the woman proposed to was the former wife of the man's deceased brother, there was no declining his offer, she was bound to accept his 'beaver snares'.<sup>1</sup>

The ceremony was really more complicated than would appear from this account. The bridegroom had to serve the bride's parents for a considerable period before he could take his wife away, and he generally obtained his father's approval before approaching the girl. If his father and the girl's mother gave their consent the youth was invited to hunt with the family, and became the girl's husband immediately, erecting a

<sup>1</sup> Morice: Op. cit., p. 122.



separate lodge for himself and his bride close to her parents' lodge. For a year or even longer the two families continued together, and the youth handed over to her parents everything he secured in his hunting except the bare necessities of his bride and himself. The bride-price, however, was never fixed, depending on the youth's success in the chase. If the girl's parents were dissatisfied they could take the bride away; but if all parties were content the fathers of both bride and bridegroom helped out the young couple with liberal presents. The youth was freed from his bondage after the birth of the first child, or, if no child was born, after a year or a little over. He could then take his wife wherever he wished. Generally he returned to his father and kinsmen, but occasionally he remained with his wife's parents for a year or two longer, though on a more equal basis.

A newly married couple never lived under the same roof as their parents, for this would have been contrary to the dignity of both families. If the girl's father died, however, her mother, in the absence of adult sons, found a home with the son-in-law, who was obliged to supply all her needs.

Divorce took place at the will of either party. The husband merely abandoned his wife, or the wife her husband, without preliminary notice. The offspring went with either parent according to mutual agreement, but divorce seldom occurred after a child was born. The woman remarried immediately, or returned to her kinsmen, who provided for her until she died or found another husband. As the Sekani lived a migratory life they had no property except what they carried or wore on their persons. It would seem that the woman retained any ornaments she had received from her husband, although on this point my information is rather indefinite.

The accepted penalty for the unfaithful wife was death or a severe beating; for her paramour, death. But since society was organized but loosely, and the task of exacting the penalty devolved on the aggrieved husband and his kin, misconduct sometimes passed unheeded. The leaping of wives to guests was not a Sekani custom; only their awe at the presence of the first white men made them complaisant in this respect towards the crew of Sir Alexander Mackenzie's canoe. Mothers kept careful watch over their unmarried daughters and shielded them from abduction by never allowing them to go out for wood or water alone. On the whole the standard of morality seems to have been high, and the marriage tie faithfully observed.

A woman in labour encamped apart from her husband, who would have bad luck in his hunting if he approached her. She knelt on the ground, supporting herself with a stick,<sup>1</sup> and when the baby issued, cut the cord with a sharp stone and hung the placenta in a tree out of sight. She then sat on a pile of brush above a pit filled with hot stones over which she or a kinswoman (if any was at hand to help), poured water that the rising steam might check the hæmorrhage. Bathing with warm water concluded the operation. The baby, wrapped in a bag of groundhog or

<sup>1</sup> Sekani women today follow the same procedure, but rest their arms on a box.



rabbit fur, was carried on its mother's back wherever she went, and nursed for about three years until it could digest a diet of meat and fish. The mother drank large quantities of moose broth whenever it was procurable, to ensure a plentiful supply of milk.

Neither infanticide nor abortion was practised, if we may believe the modern Sekani. Even twins were preserved, although often it must have been impossible to rear them, and the weaker succumbed. The child received its first clothes when it began to walk—a coat of caribou fur that reached to the ankles, leggings of the same fur, and moccasins with an inner lining of rabbit fur. At the age of about five it assumed clothes corresponding to its sex, patterned exactly like those of its elders.

The name was given soon after birth, either by the father, or by a man known to have many dream-guardians. Usually it was simply a modification of the dream-guardian's name, as "moose-antler" when the dream-guardian was "moose"; but it might also be a name revealed in the dream that gave medicine-power. Dogs were often named in the same manner. Today dream-guardians are disappearing, and children frequently receive high-sounding titles of little significance, or adhere to names bestowed by the missionaries. Nicknames have always been common, and at Fort Grahame, where the Indians are attempting to establish a phratric system, a few men have taken titles in potlatches; but the name given soon after birth, which in olden times was always associated with the dream-guardian idea, is still regarded as the individual's true name through life.

The life of the average child was uneventful until the age of puberty. As the first set of teeth dropped out they were thrown towards the rising sun to make the new set grow more rapidly.<sup>1</sup> At puberty boys and girls underwent special rituals. The ritual for boys was positive in its aim, seeking to make them successful hunters in after life. The girls' ritual, which was repeated periodically through life, had a negative purpose, the protection of the community from the mysterious danger that attached, it was thought, to all women at regular intervals. It is needless to add, perhaps, that similar rituals for both sexes prevailed over the larger part of North America, so that their functions among the Sekani do not necessarily explain their origin.

Let us consider first the ritual for boys. Each boy underwent a period of probation that lasted from one to two years, its exact length being determined by the duration of a hard lump at the base of the nipple which appears at puberty and disappears at its close.<sup>2</sup> At its first appearance the boy was sent into the woods to seek his hunting medicine, as described in the chapter on Religion. Thereafter, he hunted with his father and kinsmen, but was adorned with special ornaments and subject to special taboos. On his wrists and ankles, and around his neck, he wore twisted cords of birds' down (from birds of any species) which would give

<sup>1</sup> Tahltan Indians for the same reason buried them under the roots of a young jackpine, according to a note by James Teit.

<sup>2</sup> This, at least, is the Sekani belief. I do not know whether it has any physiological foundation.

his limbs a feathery lightness in the chase. He was forbidden to eat the liver, leg-meat embedded in sinew, marrow, and blood of all animals, for they would make him heavy and slow of foot. Forbidden, too, were the heads of animals, for they would dim his sight. He might eat and drink very little until evening, and then barely enough to satisfy his needs. At the close of his probation, when the hard lumps disappeared from his breast, he removed his ornaments, observed only such food taboos as were enjoined upon him by his dream-guardian, and married as soon as he wished.

The ritual for a girl and for a married woman was the same. Each month she camped apart for several days in a small brush hut, drinking from a special birch-bark cup and supplied by her mother or female relatives with dried meat and dried fish. If she ate fresh meat or fresh fish at this season she would spoil the hunters' luck. Since even to look at a hunter would impair his success in the chase, she covered her eyes whenever she left her shelter. She might not walk in a hunter's trail, or touch his beaver net, though she could handle his knife, ax, or snow-shoes. If she looked inside the den of a black bear that a hunter had slain he would kill no others; and if she walked through running water no more fish would be caught in that stream. Several foods were forbidden to women who were able to bear children. They might not eat eggs, for then labour would be accompanied by much pain; or a beaver that had drowned, for they would choke in their chests (become consumptive); or young beaver, which would make them blind; or the head of any animal, which would have the same effect as young beaver. Only when a woman became old and unable to bear more children were these taboos lifted from her.<sup>1</sup>

Practically all the camp labour fell on the women, in order that the men might devote their whole time to hunting, which sometimes kept them away two or three days. It was the women, therefore, who carried the water and collected the firewood, cooked the meals, cleaned the hides, and made the clothing. Often, when the men returned worn out but successful, the women followed their trail and brought the meat to the camp; and on the march they carried all the camp paraphernalia so that the men could search ahead for game.

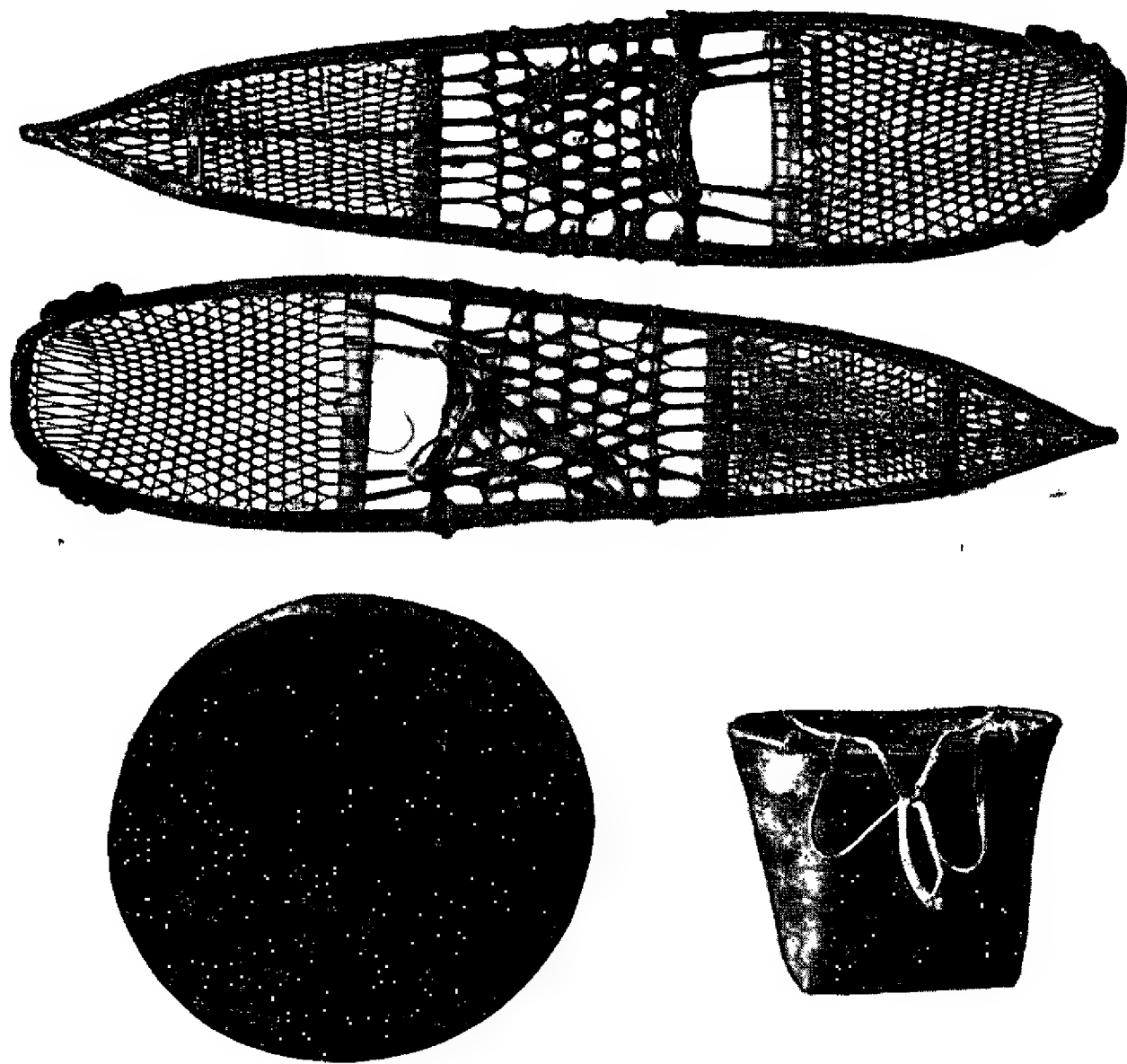
There were several signals or signs for conveying information to people travelling behind:

- (a) If the children made too much noise, the hunter stopped and whistled two or three times in succession.
- (b) A zig-zag mark on the snow meant that the hunter had sighted game and that his family should remain quiet and wait for another signal. A blanket or coat left on the ground meant "stop and camp."
- (c) A column of smoke on a hill-top meant that something had happened, usually that the hunter had killed game, and that the party behind should hasten to join him.

<sup>1</sup> The Long Grass people, through their association with the Carrier and Gitksan, acquired the belief that any marital association between husband and wife produced a taint that was displeasing to animals. Hence hunters slept for long periods apart from their wives, who accompanied them merely to take care of the hides and meat.

- (d) Spruce boughs 3 or 4 feet long thrown on the ice meant "Make haste. Something is wrong."
- (e) Three sticks planted in line close together meant that the party in front had gone ahead a few miles. If the sticks were planted far apart, a foot or more, it meant that the party was at least a day's journey ahead.
- (f) A bundle of grass, or a rag, tied to a stick meant "starving."
- (g) Hair tied to a stick (today a little cross) meant "some one has died."

## PLATE XIII



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Sekani drum, birch-bark basket, and snow-shoes.

Life in a Sekani camp, however, was not all hardship. The people had dances and amusements similar to those of other Indians. None of the early explorers has described the ancient manner of dancing, which has long since been forgotten. We know, however, that the only musical instrument was the tambourine, a parchment of caribou skin stretched tautly over a circular wooden hoop and beaten with a thin stick, usually split at one end. It differed from the Carrier and Gitksan instrument in

having under its membrane two snares or vibrant cords that the drummer could tighten or slacken with his thumb by means of a noose (Plate XIII). Whether the Sekani used this drum in dancing is not certain, but it was indispensable for the gambling games to which they were passionately addicted. McLeod Lake natives remember three varieties, two played with sticks, the third with crudely made dice.

- (a) The *nāt'a* game: there were generally eight players, four on each side facing one another. Between them lay twelve sticks for use as counters, and a drummer sat close by beating a tambourine. Side A began, each man hiding in one hand a stick of wood or bone, and a selected player on side B guessed which hand concealed it. If he guessed right for Nos. 1 and 4, but wrong for 2 and 3, 1 and 4 dropped out and 2 and 3 each won a counter. He guessed again to eliminate 2 and 3, after which his own side hid the sticks.
- (b) The *atched* game: played like the preceding, but one of the four sticks was marked. As the drummer beat his tambourine side A hid the sticks beneath four mittens, "I hope you miss it"; and the guesser of the opposing side tried to knock off the mitten that concealed the marked stick. If he guessed rightly he took a counter; but whether he guessed rightly or wrongly it was his side's turn to hide the sticks.
- (c) Dice (*tsaīli*: "throwing up"): a bone dice marked differently on four faces was tossed into the air. The count depended, of course, on the face which turned up.

The last of these games, dice, was also an ancient Carrier game, Morice says,<sup>1</sup> that had fallen into disuse long before his time. The other two games were probably of equal antiquity, for Simon Fraser saw the Shuswap play a game of hazard that "resembled that of the Rocky Mountain Meadow Indians by means of a small stick, bone, stone or anything else of a small size which under their robe they hide in one of their hands and afterwards place them in kimboo while they continue humming a song which is the only one I observed among them and either win or lose as their antagonist point out the hand that contain the mark or not."<sup>2</sup>

Still another game, snow-snake (*didzazi*), which was very popular with the younger men and also lent itself to gambling, seems to date from pre-European times. For this, the Sekani, unlike the Gitksan and some of the Carrier, did not make an artificial mound of snow, but bounced their darts off the natural surface.

The Sekani, constantly on the move from one hunting or fishing ground to another, could make little provision for those who were unable to keep pace with their wanderings. The aged and infirm dropped out and died of starvation. Their kinsmen built them good shelters, laid beside them whatever goods they could spare and some wood to replenish their fires, and departed hastily to soften the grief of farewell. If they killed game in the vicinity, they occasionally rescued an abandoned relative before death intervened; but often this would have been useless and even cruel, for the never-ending quest for food was certain to drive them away again sooner or later, this time never to return. So, generally, they made their victim as comfortable as they could and vanished quickly behind his brush shelter,

<sup>1</sup> Morice: Op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Second Journal of Simon Fraser; Bancroft Collection, June 3, 1808 (copy in Library of Geological Survey).

that no look of reproach might follow their departing forms and bring misfortune upon them later.

Harmon states that in the early years of the nineteenth century the Sekani of Fort McLeod burned their dead; whereas, while they resided on the other side of the mountain, they were accustomed to bury them in the ground. Elsewhere in his journal he mentions that a Sekani burned the body of his murdered wife near McLeod lake, and describes from his own observations the cremation of a Sekani hunter in the half-Carrier, half-Sekani village between Stuart and Trembleur lakes.<sup>1</sup> The present inhabitants of Fort McLeod seem not to recollect the earlier practice of burial in the ground, but have a clear remembrance of cremation.<sup>2</sup> The corpse, clothed in the garments of everyday life, rested on four large logs, over which four other logs were then laid. The ankles of women were bound together with red willow roots twisted into rope; those of men were unbound. After the fire had burned down the calcined bones were wrapped in spruce bark and buried in sandy ground. Often the wife carried them on her back to a good burial place near an old campsite or on familiar hunting territory; and sometimes, to display her grief, she crushed them to powder and carried them suspended from her neck inside a moose-skin bag, which she embroidered on both sides with porcupine quills. These practices, borrowed by the Sekani from the Carriers during the first quarter of the nineteenth century or a little earlier and continued until the end of its second quarter, illustrate how rapidly, in a tribe of low social organization and simple culture, even the burial customs can be assimilated to the customs of neighbours more advanced.

After cremation was discontinued, the Sekani revived an old custom, probably never entirely abandoned, of covering the dead man with the brush hut that had sheltered him during his last days and then deserting the locality for a period. Persons of influence were buried in coffins raised on platforms or trees. Thus Morice says "Supposing the deceased was an influential person dear to the band, they would hollow a kind of coffin out of a large spruce tree and suspend his remains therein on the forks formed by the branches of two contiguous trees. Some instances are also recounted in which the remains of such persons were closed up in a standing position in the hollow trunk of a large tree while in its natural state. The lid or door of these primitive coffins was usually formed of a split piece of wood which, when strongly laced with long switches of red willow, held it to the trunk of the tree in its original shape."<sup>3</sup> Fort McLeod natives told me that the hollow log or coffin was often closed with groundhog robes instead of with a board, and that it sometimes was set on two posts carefully smoothed so that no mice or other animals could climb up and desecrate the corpse. The custom was abandoned half a century ago, when the natives adopted the ordinary Christian method of burial in the ground.

<sup>1</sup> Harmon, D.: *Op. cit.*, p. 310; 215-216.

<sup>2</sup> *Pace* Morice, A. G.: *American Anthropologist*, vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 576-7.

<sup>3</sup> Morice, A. G.: *The Western Dénés; Proc. Can. Inst.*, 3rd ser., vol. VII, 1888-9, p. 146.

Neither food nor property was burned or buried with the corpse, but whatever the dead man left behind him was divided among his family or kin. Widows and widowers underwent no bondage, and could remarry whenever they wished. The eldest son or nearest male relative gave a feast to all the band six months, a year, or two years after the funeral, according to his success in hunting; but whether this was an ancient custom, or derived from the Carrier, is uncertain. In any case it was purely commemorative, and involved no change in the name or rank of the giver of the feast, as usually happened among the Carrier.

The modern Sekani, especially the older people, still continue to mourn months and even years after their relatives have been taken from them. A man (or woman) will sit on the shore of McLeod lake in the morning, or at dusk, and lament his dead wife in a loud piercing wail, that echoes far over the water, rising and falling through the scale of an octave. After it dies away, one may see the melancholy mourner returning to his cabin to take up again the burden of his daily life.

The above description of the burial customs deals only with the McLeod Lake Indians. The early customs of the Fort Grahame natives are unknown to me, but they were probably very similar, since the two branches of the Sekani were in frequent contact throughout the nineteenth century. The marriage and puberty customs in both groups were the same.

The T'lotona or Long Grass band of the Sekani, who separated from their kinsmen and moved into the Groundhog country about 1850, developed very different social customs through their contact and intermarriage with the Gitksan and Tahltan. These I shall discuss in the same order as before, beginning with the marriage customs.

The youth who wished to marry consulted his parents, and, after gaining their consent, announced his desire, not to the girl he had chosen for his wife, but to her parents and kinsmen. If they approved they invited him to accompany them to their hunting grounds, where he presented all the furs he obtained to his future father-in-law. Not until the kinsmen were satisfied with the number of bales he had supplied would the girl's father hold the marriage feast, so that sometimes the youth was in bondage for several years. At this marriage feast, with the clans sitting on opposite sides of the lodge, her father distributed among his kin all the furs the youth had collected, and the youth's own parents added further gifts from their own stock. Then at last the youth might take his bride to his father's home or hunting grounds. Yet although she was now his wife, fully bought and paid for, custom still required him to make small presents to her people at irregular intervals.

Divorce occurred frequently, provided there were no children, but after children were born it was rare or unknown. The usual cause was infidelity, but a husband might cast off an idle and useless wife, and a woman might leave her husband if he failed to provide for her. Kinsmen generally tried to patch up an estrangement. If the husband was at fault but wished his wife back, his sister or aunt carried a peace offering to her

kinsfolk, and, if successful, brought the wife back with similar offerings. A man rarely took upon himself the initiative of sending his wife away, but laid the burden on his father or nearest kinsmen.

Instances of polygamy were said to be unknown, but in one or two cases a woman had simultaneously taken two husbands who had previously served her parents for a term and agreed to share her between them.

A baby had no name until it was about a year old, but was called simply "boy child" or "little woman." After about twelve months it received the name of its father's crest, slightly modified, at a feast in which the father, the mother, or the mother's brother called on the principal men to pronounce and sanction it. The mother's kinsmen acknowledged their courtesy by giving them presents, and at the same time distributed presents among the father's kin. This first name lapsed at adolescence, when the child received a permanent or "feast" name, also derived from its father's crest. The permanent name indicated his rank, and the relative position he should occupy at feasts.

At adolescence boys fasted to obtain "medicine" for hunting, as described later. Every girl was isolated in a special lodge for about a year, and thereafter remained as close as possible to her mother until she married. During her isolation her parents announced her approaching maturity by giving a feast at which the father's kinsmen distributed small presents to the kinsmen of the mother. When her people were travelling the girl blackened her face, covered her head with a deep bonnet that prevented her from seeing the mountains or the sky, and followed their trail half a mile behind, guided, whenever necessary, by marks that her mother set up. No man was allowed near her, nor might she touch any of their possessions, but at streams her mother or sisters lingered behind to carry her across. She entered the camp after night-fall, and made her way to a rude shelter her parents had erected for her in the vicinity, wherever possible behind some bushes. Throughout her probation she might eat the fresh insides of animals, the heart or the liver, but not the outside flesh and fat unless it was dried.

In their movements from place to place the Long Grass Indians seem to have set up signs that were slightly different from those of the McLeod Lake and Finlay River Sekani.

- (a) A burning tree was an urgent call, meaning that a party was hurrying to catch up, that it had too much meat, or that someone had fallen dangerously ill.
- (b) A slanting stick left in an empty camp indicated that the camp had been moved in the direction to which the stick pointed. Lines were drawn in charcoal round the stick corresponding in number to the hunters who happened to be absent when the camp was moved.
- (c) An upright stick with a black ring around it meant that some one was dead. If the ring lacked completeness by the width of three fingers the person was dying. The number of survivors was indicated by a circle of sticks around the dead man's stick, long ones for adults and shorter ones for children.
- (d) A stick pointing to the sky, marked with a rayed circle to represent the sun, indicated the time of day a person had passed that place.



The gambling games were also slightly different from those of the other Sekani. One was played with from two to four sticks, but my informant had forgotten the details. In another a man on one side juggled in his hands two bear's teeth or bones, one of them specially marked, and the guesser on the other side had to choose the hand which concealed the marked bone. Other games were:

- (a) Snow-snake, played with a long heavy stick and no snow-bank.
- (b) Hoop and spear. A man stood at one end of a level patch of ground and bowled a hoop towards another man at the other end. Fast runners pursued it and tried to catch it on long sticks before it reached the mark.
- (c) Two men interlocked their middle fingers and tugged against each other; or, alternately, they tugged on the bone of an animal.
- (d) Men tested their strength by trying to break in their hands the hind leg bone of the beaver.
- (e) Men inflated the bladders of different animals, dried them and tried to burst them with their fists. A moderately strong man could burst the bladders of the caribou, moose, and bear, but no one, it is said, could burst the bladder of the mountain goat.
- (f) Tug of war with a rawhide line, or with a slippery pole. In this game the sexes often took sides against one another.
- (g) Boys played with bull-roarers, thin, flat laths of wood, wider at the bottom than at the top, attached by caribou sinew to a stick and swung through the air. They also made buzzers from the knuckle bones of the caribou.
- (h) Girls played hide and seek to train themselves to be quick of eye.

When a man died women relatives belonging to his own phratry washed the corpse and consigned it to the care of the other two phratries, whose members gathered to weep and burn it. They wrapped it in skins proportionate in number to the dead man's dignity and burned it within twenty-four hours, hastening the death-rites through fear of the ghost. In more recent times the Long Grass Indians have substituted Christian burial for cremation; they lay out the corpse for at least two days, and carry it for interment to a large graveyard at the southern end of Hotlesklwa lake (about latitude  $57^{\circ} 20'$ , longitude  $127^{\circ} 55'$ ), the lake "where fish are as numerous as grains of earth."<sup>1</sup>

At a convenient time after the cremation the dead man's phratry feasted the other two phratries, and paid the people who had performed the obsequies. At the same time it bestowed on the dead man's successor, usually his sister's son, the crest ornaments and rank of the deceased. If the man had belonged to the Wolf phratry, for example, his successor donned a wolf skin and entered the lodge with drooping mien to the accompaniment of a mournful song. Presently the singers changed to a lively tune and he danced more cheerfully, finally taking his seat in the new place to which he had fallen heir. A brother or sister of the deceased then entered the lodge, clad in a robe of tanned caribou hide decorated with the phratric crest either painted in red or worked in porcupine quills; and after them other kinsmen entered garbed in much the same fashion.

<sup>1</sup> According to Angus Beaton, a white trapper and prospector who had travelled extensively in the Groundhog country, there is a large graveyard at "Spruce island," an isolated forest of spruce trees close to Buckingham lake.



About the end of the nineteenth century the old style of costume disappeared, and the Long Grass people substituted for this decorated robe of caribou hide a robe of marten, lynx, or beaver, or else a coat of European style on which the crest was patterned in coloured cloth or pearl buttons.

Relatives cut off the widow's hair immediately after the funeral, for if she failed to show proper respect for her dead husband and kept her hair long one of her own brothers would shortly die. She remained with her father-in-law, or the nearest kinsmen of her husband, for two and sometimes three years, being regarded as a mere servant and treated accordingly. A chief's widow, however, was generally respected, and not forced, like other widows, to keep her face blackened so that it would reveal her tears. After about two years, when her hair was long again, a widow might remarry or return to her people.

An unmarried brother of a dead man normally married the widow in order to retain the use of her property; otherwise the widow and her children turned for support to her nearest kinsman. When a wife died the husband married any sister that was still unwed. Since husband and wife belonged to different phratries neither could inherit the other's property. The property of a woman normally went to her mother, sister, or aunt, not to her own children, although they belonged to her phratry, because her mother's brothers or her own brothers were bound to support them; and whatever valuables a man possessed went to his brother or sister's child, who belonged to his own phratry.

## CHAPTER VII

## RELIGION

The Sekani are today faithful adherents of the Roman Catholic Church, and at Fort McLeod have built a church where they hold services of song each Sunday, though the missionary may visit them only once a year. There is no church at Fort Grahame, but there also the natives meet frequently to chant Christian hymns. Monotheism, however, is a new doctrine to them. The idea was first implanted, apparently, by the white factors and by Iroquois and other Indians in the service of the two great trading companies during the first years of the nineteenth century. The Sekani then began to talk about *Hatā*, God, just as the Carriers spoke of *Yagastā*, "he who sits on top of the sky," and the Tahltan of *Yekaside*, the kindly chief of the sky. The term *Hatā* is said to have been applied previously to any outstanding medicine man who claimed to have received his power from the thunder-bird; but it is open to question whether the notion of the thunder-bird also was not borrowed within the last two centuries, perhaps from the Cree. Certainly it does not appear prominently in the mythology of the Sekani.

The new doctrine of monotheism received a powerful impetus from Oregon, where the teachings of the first missionaries, perverted apparently by two natives educated on Red river near Winnipeg, produced an amazing Messianistic craze that spread northward up Fraser river through the Shuswap to the Carrier, whom it reached about 1830. One of the early writers, John M'Lean, thus describes it:

"Two young men, natives of Oregon, who had received a little education at Red River, had, on their return to their own country, introduced a sort of religion, whose groundwork seemed to be Christianity accompanied with some of the heathen ceremonies of the natives. It reached Fort Alexandria, the lower post of the district, in the autumn; and was now embraced by all the Nekaslayans (Carriers of Stuart lake). The ceremonial consisted chiefly in singing and dancing. As to the doctrines of our holy religion, their minds were too gross to comprehend, and their manner too corrupt to be influenced by them. They applied to us for instruction, and our worthy chief spared no pains to give it. But, alas! it is for the most part labour in vain. Yet, an impression seemed to have been made on a few; and had there been missionaries there at the time, their efforts might have proved successful. But the influence of the 'men of Medicine,' who strenuously withstand a religion which exposes their delusive tricks, and consequently deprives them of their gains—together with the dreadful depravity everywhere prevalent—renders the conversion of the Tekallies an object most difficult to accomplish."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M'Lean, John: Notes on Twenty Five Years Service in the Hudson's Bay Company; vol. 1, London, 1849, pp. 263-4.

Several branches of the Carrier nation were affected by this craze, none more than the western branch on Bulkley river, who carried it to the neighbouring Gitksan. They carried it also to Babine lake, whence it spread to the Sekani of Bear lake who later moved to Fort Grahame. From this source, apparently, or from the Gitksan of upper Skeena river, it reached the Tahltan, on Stikine river. The Carrier of Stuart lake conveyed the same doctrine to the Sekani of McLeod lake, among whom it remains today but a memory. But at Fort Grahame its repercussions still echo, despite the faithful labours of Roman Catholic missionaries.

The craze took much the same form among all three Athapaskan tribes, Carrier, Tahltan, and Sekani, though the first-mentioned developed it more than the other two. The new "Messiah" fell into a trance or "died," as the natives say, for an hour, a day, or two days; his soul mounted to the sky, whence God sent it back with a message. The signal for its return was a low song breathed through the lips of the apparently lifeless body. The bystanders took up the new song, the "Messiah" rose to his feet, and the people danced and sang around him. Preaching, prophecy, confession of sins, healing of the sick, baptism, renaming, frequently but not invariably accompanied the manifestations; and these rites were repeated at intervals of a few days until the craze wore off.<sup>1</sup> Sekani Messiahs, unlike the Carrier, adopted no peculiarities of dress and received no "paraphernalia from the sky."

The following accounts come from Fort McLeod, and refer to manifestations that occurred between 1870 and 1880. It is probable that many occurred earlier, since the craze reached the Stuart Lake Indians around 1835; but on this point I have no information. After 1880 it subsided in this region permanently.

"Six McLeod Lake Sekani, five men and one woman, have "died," ascended to heaven, and returned to life, receiving from God these new names: Loud Singer (*adji*), He Flew up to the Sky (*yatassa*), He passed on top of the Sky (*yagina-tal*), *Dizaskun*, a name of unknown meaning, and Good Singer (*uzadjin*); the last-mentioned was a woman.

"Adji was not ill. He lay quietly in his tent, surrounded by onlookers. With eyes closed, and breathing still, he lay for twenty minutes, dead. Once before he had visited heaven and returned to earth, so that the people knew what was about to happen. The murmured syllables of a song issued from his lips. He sat up, and gazing with a far-off look at the audience, described what he had seen in the sky. 'God has named me Adji, the 'Loud Singer,' he said. 'Hereafter you must do no evil.' He issued other injunctions similar to those the priest now gives. Then the people sang his song, but they did not dance.

"Uzadjin, Good Singer, who died at a great age about 1914, visited the sky more than a score of times, securing a new song on each occasion. Each time she lay as if dead for a period varying from half an hour to an

<sup>1</sup> For a literary description of the cult among the western Carrier see Barbeau, C. M.: "Indian Days in the Canadian Rockies", Toronto, 1923, Ch. 1.

hour, and on recovery announced what she had seen or heard. She reported on one occasion that she had heard a bell ringing in heaven, and warned the people that some one would shortly die. Uzadjin sometimes healed the sick by dancing round them and singing her heavenly songs.

"Dizaskun was the last native of Fort McLeod to visit the sky. Besides acquiring a new name for himself, he gave a new name to his mother."

Fort Grahame natives gave similar accounts:

"Before the Bear Lake band of the Sekani moved to Fort Grahame a man named Matoteha died and returned to life. Before his death he asked the people not to burn his body, but to keep watch. He lay in his tent all night, motionless. At dawn he began to sing, repeating always the same song. As it gained in volume his eyes opened, his body moved, and at last he sat up. 'I have been to a far country,' he said. 'I have seen God. God bade me warn you not to kill, or steal, or do anything that is evil. In that country live all the good Indians who have died heretofore.' Matoteha then rose, took up his drum and danced; and the people danced with him, singing his song.

"Matoteha was a very great medicine-man. His other name was *Hatā*, a name given only to medicine men who far surpassed their fellows. Once he visited the thunder-bird and its young high up on a mountain, and plucked a feather from the tail of the young bird, despite the terrible heat. Because no one believed him when he returned, he asked his son-in-law to draw near, but the man was unable to approach him because the red feather scorched him like lightning. Matoteha, for a heavy payment, restored the dead to life by placing his feather under the head of the corpse. At last, when he was an old man, he died again at Bear Lake, and warned his people as usual not to burn or bury his corpse. They watched over him for ten days; but when his body began to waste away and the spirit failed to return, they placed him in a burial house on top of a platform.

"Another Indian named Satche died at Bear Lake and returned to life. He told the Sekani that he had visited God's home in a beautiful country, but was ordered to return and teach people the true way of life; then, after two hours, he might go back to the sky. Two hours later Satche died and never rose again.

"The daughter of William Bear, an old man living at Fort Grahame in 1924, had a similar experience about 1905. She was dead for two hours, and on returning to life declared that she had seen a beautiful land wherein lay a wonderful house with nothing but good things inside and around it. It was God's home, but God taught her no song.

"Old Davie, the leader of the new *tseloni* band, is the only man still living who has visited the sky. He has died on several occasions, seen God, and received new songs that, issuing through his half-closed lips, announce his return to life."

This Messianistic craze developed not illogically from the earlier beliefs of the Sekani. The Christian doctrine of a single God who dwells in a far-away heaven has merely replaced the older but still surviving notion of "supernatural power" residing in birds and animals. Instead of dying and mounting to the sky to receive *nadetché*, medicine power, direct from God, the Sekani received it from an animal by fasting and dreaming in solitude. The new songs, and the new names, obtained by the modern Messiahs, closely resemble those obtained by the seeker of medicine power before them. Baptism and confession of sins have been added from Christian rituals, but in the main the new Messianistic practices are but a modification of the ancient rites.

## PLATE XIV



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'Old Davie and some of the women of the Long Grass band. (Photo by Wm. Ware.)

In the old Sekani religion there seem to have been no deities. Animals were like human beings in ancient times, and there were many strange monsters that preyed upon mankind. All these monsters were destroyed long since; they lived only in *witchetsa*, "olden times." The legends tell of great heroes, of a trickster who wandered over the earth making things as they are today, and of a great flood; but many of these stories have been derived from the Carrier, the Cree, and other neighbouring tribes, and the ideas they embody seem hardly to have touched the native life. There may have been local spirits, supernatural beings that haunted special localities such as rapids, lakes, or mountains, but if so they have been practically forgotten. More deep-seated and lasting was the belief

that man and the animal world are linked together in some mysterious way, and that the animals possess special powers which they may grant to man if he seeks them in the proper manner.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to obtain from a Sekani a clear notion of this mystic bond that binds the animal world to man. It is not in the individual animal that the power resides—not in the moose or lynx that falls a victim to the hunter's rifle—but in the species as a whole. Two men may acquire different powers from the same animal, and it is conceivable that different animals may impart the same power. Moreover these powers seem to be separate units, not portions of a greater power diffused through the universe, part in one animal and part in another. The Sekani, apparently, felt no necessity to seek a single source for it, like an all-powerful sky-god, or a vague, mysterious, all-pervading force; he had no yearning towards abstractions. In the old days, tradition said, animals and man had been alike. Animals still resemble man in certain ways, and even surpass him; the animal thinks like man, excels him in strength, speed, or cunning. So man logically turned to the animal world to secure help for the crises of life, and established a certain relationship with it. The animals might withhold their help and grant a man no "medicine"; but, generally speaking, he who sought it by the proper methods seldom went home empty handed.

Certain animals were more closely associated with man than others, and it was from these, not unnaturally, that the Sekani obtained their "medicine." One native expressed their attitude thus: "The Carrier, who are fish-eaters, may obtain medicine from fish and water-animals; but we live by the chase, and our 'medicines' came from the bear, the moose, the caribou, animals and birds essential to our life." This was the Sekani "hunting medicine," *nadetché*, obtainable only before marriage when man was free from taint; it differed slightly from another kind of "medicine," the "medicine" used for sickness, which might be gained at any time. To reveal the details of the "hunting medicine," or to use it often, destroyed its force. An old man whom it could serve no longer might tell of the medicine he had received in youth, and sometimes people discovered each other's medicines through beholding their operation. But the vision was almost never revealed. It was the heart of the medicine, as it were, and the medicine was a secret gift, for use in emergencies only, often just once in a lifetime.

Every youth, then, when he reached the age of puberty, was sent forth alone to seek a "hunting medicine" that he could summon to his aid in after-life. This was part of his puberty ritual. He left in the early morning, fasting, and wandered all day in the woods, beside a lake, or up the mountain side. He might return in the evening, eat a scanty meal, and go out again the next morning; or he might remain away two or three nights. Some youths were fortunate and gained their medicines in a single day; others sought for three or four weeks. Few failed, or, if they failed, did not

confess their failure, since no one would ask them what they had seen or heard.

A youth unable to obtain medicine in the ordinary way might even bring influence to bear on the animal world. He would enclose a number of frogs inside a circular wall of birch bark from which they could not escape, and sleep inside the enclosure. During the night the frogs would disappear into his sleeping body and medicine of some kind would quickly come to him.

The following descriptions given by Fort McLeod natives illustrate the manner in which a boy might gain his medicine:

"A boy at puberty may be out on the mountains, seeking his medicine. He hears singing, though no one is in sight; wondering, he continues on his way. A caribou approaches him, and he falls to the ground, apparently dead. The caribou walks around him all night. At last the boy awakens, and after remaining in the same place for two days, returns to his home. Before entering the camp he smokes his body over a fire of balsam brush, lest his people smell the taint of the caribou that visited him. Thereafter, when hunting, he may wear a cap of caribou fur, if so instructed by his animal visitor.

"A boy may sleep the first night on a caribou trail, the next night on a bear trail, and the third beside a lake. On the third night he may see a big fish like a canoe swallow a moose, a caribou, or a bear. He will probably remain there two more nights before returning home. After he becomes a man, and is known to possess medicine power, no one may rise and walk about when he eats; for then he will have difficulty in swallowing his food and angrily snap his teeth, causing the offender's death.

"Another youth may go out to the woods for five days and five nights, sleeping on the ground beside a fire under the open sky. At night a grizzly bear cub lies on one of his shoulders, a black bear cub on the other. The youth awakens and says to himself 'Now I have good medicine.' He clasps the cubs tightly in his arms, and they disappear into his body. Presently he hears a song, the song of the black bear cub, succeeded by the song of the grizzly cub. When he awakes he is still lying on the ground beside the embers of his fire; but the song remains in his memory. Thus he has medicine for black and grizzly bears. It may happen that five or ten years later he and his people are starving. Then he will sleep apart from his wife and sing the songs that the bear taught him. When day dawns he goes out hunting, finds black and grizzly bears and kills them without difficulty. If a youth sees a bear for several nights and hears the bear's song then he will have strong medicine, but it will avail him only for killing bears, not for moose or other game. Similarly moose medicine is useless except for moose.

"Still another youth may be wandering in the woods, seeking his medicine, when he comes upon a moose labouring in deep snow. He approaches it, intending to shoot, but the moose says to him 'Do not shoot me. You will be starving some time or other in the years to come and then



I will help you.' The youth allows the moose to escape, receiving medicine in return. A few years later, perhaps, when his people are starving, a moose will plant itself in his tracks and allow him to kill it.

"Or he may obtain medicine from a black bear in the same way, by sparing a black bear in its hole. In time of need, remembering the bear's promise of aid, he will go out alone and easily kill one or two bears."

An old man at Fort Grahame thus described his acquisition of hunting medicine:

"When I was a boy my mother sent me out into the woods to seek my medicine. I climbed the slope of a mountain and at sunset reached the nest of an eagle. It contained only one eaglet, the second having been shot by an Indian; but the mother bird returned before dark. I slept under the nest that night, and the mother eagle spoke to me, saying 'I fly all around until I find game; then I pursue and kill it. You go and do likewise.' The next day I went home. My brother met me near the camp and said 'We were afraid that a grizzly bear or something had killed you'; and I answered 'No. I merely stayed out all night because I saw something.' No one asked me what I had seen, for the people knew that a man must not reveal his medicine. Now in my dreams I often see where there is game, and never fail to find it the next morning. That is my medicine. But since the priests have come to us the Indians at Fort Grahame no longer seek the old medicines. They carry rosaries when they go to the woods, and count half the beads as a prayer each morning, and the other half each night. But I am not sure whether the rosaries are as effective as the old medicines."

Even a girl may acquire hunting medicine. A Fort McLeod native narrated the following episode that occurred, he said, when he was a young man:

"A party that was hunting in the mountains lost an axe, and sent a young girl back along the trail to search for it. She wandered back several miles and met a wolverene carrying the axe. It spoke to her, and gave her the axe, for which she thanked it. Thereafter she possessed medicine for wolverenes."

Songs and amulets often accompanied medicine, but not invariably. A man who had medicine for caribou might wear a caribou horn attached to his belt, or a cap from the fur of a caribou head; he might have seen a caribou in his vision, and been told to wear one of these things. Or he might wear a necklace of swan's neck with the feathers turned in, and when driving caribou against a fence set with snares attach the feathers to the end of the fence that the animals might not break away in the wrong direction. Another man who had also obtained medicine for caribou might receive no song, and be told to wear no amulet; or the same amulet might be worn for another purpose. Certain hunters wore caps made of grizzly bear skin, or carried arrows blackened in the fire and painted red or green, arrows that never missed the mark. Others again were subject to



taboos. One man at Fort Grahame will not eat fat from the belly of the moose; another will not eat any meat from a bull moose; a third will not eat the tail of a beaver. All medicine was obtained through dreams, and dreams are infinitely varied in pattern. Whatever a youth saw in his dreams, whatever he was told to do or wear, that was his medicine, that he obeyed.

The Sekani tell many stories of the uses of hunting medicine. If moose were escaping across the top of a snow-slide a man who had medicine for moose might cry aloud and cause a fresh snow-slide to overwhelm and kill them; if he had medicine for wolf he might howl like a wolf and rob their legs of strength so that they could not travel. A man who had medicine for caribou would dream of them at night and whistle; the caribou, hitherto unseen, would draw in towards the camp and be killed the next morning. Likewise a man who had beaver medicine would walk across a creek above a beaver house, thus preventing the animals from escaping up-stream. A man who died at Fort McLeod not long ago had medicine that would cause snow. When his people were starving, unable to kill moose, he burned the feathers of a swan in the fire, and sang his medicine song all night. Snow fell for two days, and the moose, floundering in its depths, were killed without difficulty by hunters mounted on snow-shoes.

An old man at Fort Grahame narrated this story:

"My grandfather had loon as his medicine. When his people were starving near Thutade Lake he said to them, 'Don't go out on the ice. I shall get fish alone. In the morning he went out alone, wearing a hat of loon skin, dug a hole in the ice and speared many fish. He left them on the ice, and, returning to camp, sent his people out to bring them in. For more than a month he supplied the camp with fish. The people then wandered away to hunt caribou. They discovered a large herd, and built two fences with inset snares. One of the hunters then said 'Let every one remain in camp while I go after the caribou alone, for I have medicine.' He went out alone and said to the caribou, 'Go down yonder and be caught in the snares.' Later the people went out to see what had happened; every snare had caught a caribou. In spite of their medicines, however, four Sekani and many Carrier at Babine and Stuart Lakes died of starvation that winter; for the moose had disappeared from the entire country."

How does this "hunting medicine" work? It works through a kind of mental telepathy. Caribou, moose, beaver, and other animals know the thoughts of men who have received medicine from them; they have spoken to them, given them songs perhaps, or told them to wear certain amulets. There is a mystic bond between them, and provided the men observe the rules the animals will obey their wishes. But always a man must beware of wearing out his "hunting-medicine." It is for emergencies only; used even three times it loses much of its strength.

Medicine for sickness bears the same name, *nadetché*, as hunting medicine, which it resembled in many ways. Both were obtained through dreams, both were secret and lost if the dream was revealed, both often involved taboos, and both might be associated with certain tokens or amulets worn or carried on the person. The Sekani attached much significance to dreams in everyday life; a hunter who dreamed that game was lacking in a place would certainly avoid that locality. Hence when a man dreamed repeatedly about anything a mysterious bond was forged between him and the object of his dream, and he acquired medicine power through the association. The object might be an animal; more often, apparently, it was inanimate, like water or a gun. Whatever it might be the medicine power resided not in the object, but in the man himself, who acquired the power through the dream-association. Its ultimate source the native seemed unable to explain, nor indeed was he interested in its metaphysical basis. But he firmly believed that it supplied a vital need in his life, helping him on those occasions when his hunting medicine was of no avail. For the hunting medicine assisted him only in time of starvation, not in sickness, or when enemies were near at hand; and it could be used only once or twice in a life-time. This other medicine never wore out, and though it served as a rule for sickness only, it might apply to other purposes. Few men acquired it, a fortunate few, and they not by searching for it at puberty, as for the hunting medicine. It came to them fortuitously, usually after marriage, since it involved no close association with the animal world and the taint of marriage made no difference. A man who obtained one medicine often obtained several, for he was blessed with peculiarly receptive powers. He was, therefore, a man of importance in his band, a true medicine-man, whose services were requisitioned in all cases of sickness. He was also a source of danger. His power was like a magic ray that can not only cure but cause sickness and death. It might even be dangerous to himself. Thus a medicine-man might be forbidden in his dream to eat food when people were walking near him. If he disobeyed the taboo, he would become insane, and the person walking near would die. Such a man, therefore, would always warn the people to sit down before he ate, and if some one chanced to rise to his feet, he would strike him with a hat, or stick, to recall the taboo to his remembrance.

Sickness, to the minds of the Sekani, was produced by one of four causes. It might arise from some physical cause, as a knife; from the patient's soul leaving his body and wandering away; through the machinations of a medicine-man; or, finally, from some cause unknown. Practically, these could be reduced to two, for the physical cause, the knife or the arrow, might be only the instrument of medicine power, and any sickness that seemed inexplicable could be ascribed to the evil machinations of a medicine-man. He might work his evil in at least two ways, probably in many; he might point his medicine token at his victim and pray that its counterpart might enter his body unseen; or he might enter a sweat-house, seize the wandering soul of his sleeping enemy in his hands and

beat it so that it could not return. Cases might occur, the Sekani thought, where a malady was caused by wrong-doing, eating forbidden food, for example; and a medicine-man might even reproach the patient with his sin. But confession in no way aided recovery, as was believed by so many tribes; and the sin was always a disobedience to one of the regular puberty regulations, or to a taboo imposed during the reception of medicine power.

Nearly all sickness, therefore, arose from medicine power. Logically, it could be countered most effectively with similar power. The Sekani did not neglect their simple remedies, nearly all herbal; but in the main they relied on the fortunate owners of sickness medicine, who used their talents to gain both wealth and influence.

An Indian, we will suppose, is sick. His relatives send for a medicine-man, or a medicine-man offers his services of his own accord. In his sleep, he may say, he has discovered the cause of the malady, and will undertake a cure for suitable payment. The relatives accept his services. What follows depends in part on the nature of the man's medicine power. If he possesses no tangible token of his power he may enter a sweat-house, where the cause of the sickness, if still unknown, is revealed to him; there he can catch the wandering soul and restore it to its owner; there he can extract from the patient's body the bone or other baneful object implanted magically by some unfriendly medicine-man. All this he can do even without visiting his patient. But if, like most medicine-men, he carries with him some token of his power, such as a knife, he will probably visit the patient in his tent, or join him in the sweat-house, sing his medicine song, and rub the sick man with the token, or bring it into physical contact with him in some other way. He will then breathe on the sufferer, and pretend to extract by suction the bone, or piece of metal, which he can hold up as the cause of the malady. Every man had his own individual methods, but discovery through dreaming, especially in a sweat-house, massage, and the apparent extraction of some object were common to almost all.

An elderly Sekani of Fort McLeod thus described the medicine powers of himself and his grandfather:

"When I was a youth I received medicine for water. Others have possessed this medicine before me, and some have borne tokens of it in the shape of large lumps on their arms or bodies; but I had no token or visible sign of medicine. When the influenza epidemic swept the country in 1918 and many of my people were stricken by the disease, I called for cold water, my medicine, and drank two or three cupfuls. The water caused me to vomit, voiding all my sickness, and in two days I was well again. That is how my medicine has helped me, although it may never help me again.

"My grandfather, *Intsidene*, 'Wind Man,' had four medicines, beaver, knife, crane and a black powder (some men, greater than their fellows, have owned 50 medicines). Beaver was hunting medicine; he received it in the woods when he was a young boy; crane, knife and black powder

were sickness medicines that came to him later in life. I do not know how he received his medicine for black powder, but when he was a very old man, and had no further use for his powers, he told me about crane and knife. This was how he gained his crane medicine.

"He had many dreams about the crane after he was married. At the end of a year he divorced his first wife and went to hunt on the Parsnip river. It was the end of winter, when the cranes return from the south. As he crossed the summit of a mountain, alone, a crane flew close to his head and called 'Loud noise close to sky, let us play for the people-over yonder.' My grandfather, realizing that he was to receive a new name and medicine power, lay down and slept; as he slept the crane came and sang to him all through the night, leaving him at daybreak. Thus he received medicine for crane, and with it a new name and a song.

"Knife medicine he received in another way. He dreamed so frequently of a knife that at last he felt sure that he would receive medicine from it. He was hunting once on the mountains, all alone, when he heard a voice say 'Marten, I am lonely. I have been here a long time and wish to go back to mankind. Help me.' My grandfather could see no one, but as he walked along, searching, he saw a knife lying on the ground beside a hole from which it had just appeared. He picked it up, saying to himself, 'Now I have medicine for knife,' continued his hunting, and at night returned to his home. On this occasion, and also when he received medicine for black powder, he obtained neither a song nor a new name.

"To cure the sick he used one or other of these three medicines, knife, crane and powder. He sat down beside the patient, closed his eyes, and sang his crane song. When he was using the powder medicine, he laid his black powder beside him, and as he sang his medicine power issued from his lips like a hiccough. Then he mixed some of the powder with water and rubbed it on his patient. He shaped his hand into a funnel, blew the medicine from the powder into the man's body and once more sang his medicine song. Now he left him, and, going into the sweat-house for an hour or two, discovered whether his patient would live or die. A patient who was to live would begin to recover immediately.

"I never saw him use his crane medicine, only the crane song. The knife that he found served him for every purpose, not for healing alone. The medicine power was not in the knife, but in himself; it was but a symbol or token of his power, and for healing he often used some other knife. He hardened its blade in the fire and rubbed it over the place where the patient felt pain, saying *ha ha ha ha ha ha*. Then, as when using the powder, he blew the medicine into the man's body and retired to the sweat-house to learn whether he would recover.

"My grandfather could kill people with the knife medicine. He could take a piece of iron, rub it between his hands, point it in the direction of his victim, praying that it would enter his body, and cause the man immediate pain. Another medicine man, discovering the cause of the pain in the sweat-house, would suck a piece of iron from the patient's body.

"The knife medicine preserved my grandfather from sickness all his life. When he was very old he obtained for the first time a steel knife that would keep a sharp edge. He said to his people, 'My knife keeps sharp. I shall die soon.' Soon afterwards he died."

The notion of sickness medicine was capable of great expansion in the hands of an imaginative or ambitious Indian. Early explorers among the Athapaskan tribes of the Mackenzie River basin tell of strange practices by the medicine-men, such as the swallowing of knives and long boards. These tricks were rare but not unknown among the Sekani, where certain possessors of sickness medicine claimed to be able to swallow bunches of porcupine quills. Some of the neighbouring Carrier tribes practised walking over red-hot coals, and employed the drum and rattle in their medicine ritual. They had also an elaborate ritual for acquiring hunting medicine, and prayed over offerings of burning caribou fat when game was scarce. None of these customs, however, were adopted by the Sekani.

Nevertheless, the Sekani did acquire, either from the Carrier or from the Gitksan (since it prevailed among both), the belief in a very strange "medicine power" that seems wholly alien to their mode of thought, but is in harmony with the beliefs and practices of the tribes along the Pacific coast. It was a belief in what one man called "air medicine," though its name at Fort McLeod is *anatak*, at Fort Grahame *senidje*, words that the natives seem unable to translate. It was an intangible thing, like air, or wind, pregnant with medicine power like an animal, but infinitely more potent. It would squeeze a man between its "hands" and place him in a big kettle strewn with feathers to keep his body warm; and it filled him with such explosive force that he shot through the air like a bullet from a gun. One man at Fort McLeod who had acquired this medicine chanted the formula he had learned (it consisted of meaningless syllables only) and was immediately shot across the lake into the woods on the far side. Some hunters sought him the next day, and found him lying on the ground, half dead. Another man was carried out of sight and did not return until two years later, when his brother, who was hunting groundhogs, found him on a mountain side, strong and well. Five years afterwards the two men ascended another mountain to hunt goats; but when the medicine man approached the summit he sang his *anatak* formula and flew far away. He was seen again only once, when a hunter sighted him from a distance. *Anatak* gave the gift of foresight; its possessor knew several days beforehand what game he would kill. Another medicine, called *ixwasi*, that closely resembled it, caused its possessor to fly through the air like a bird, or like a tiny transparent man.

Fort Grahame natives, who called the same medicine *senidje*, gave a slightly different account. *Senidje*, they said, struck a man between the shoulders like a gust of wind, or caught him by the hair, and flung him many yards over the ground. He lost his wits, and in that condition received instruction and medicine power from *senidje*. Their description

closely parallels the accounts given by the western Carrier of an intangible, invisible force called *kyan*, which strikes a man senseless and then renders him crazy for a period. Such an experience qualifies him for membership in a secret society, the "cannibal" society found under various forms all along the British Columbia coast.

The T'lotona or Long Grass band, hybridized by intermarriage and close contact with Tahltan and Gitksan Indians, had a different conception of medicine power. Dreams still remained its basis, but the distinction between hunting and sickness medicine was drawn along other lines. Both were obtained at the same time, and by the same procedure, but few men obtained more than the hunting medicine; and the sickness medicine had two grades, the lower giving only the power of diagnosis, not of cure.

Every youth at the age of puberty was sent to climb a mountain, either alone or with a companion of the same age. He carried with him, or found on the mountain, a flake of obsidian, with which he cut out the tongue of a ptarmigan, an ermine, or an owl. He threw the tongue into the fire, and as it burned he prayed, "May I become a swift runner, an accurate shot, a powerful medicine-man able to cure all diseases." For four days and four nights he fasted, neither eating nor drinking. The higher he ascended the mountain the more certainly his prayer would be answered. On the fifth day he rejoined his people camped below and built a hut beyond the range of their hearing. There he remained from spring until autumn, supplied by a boy with food from his parent's home. He might eat meat of any kind, but only the minimum necessary for life, and the heads and hearts of all animals were forbidden him.<sup>1</sup> Herbs were permitted, and an occasional draught or pill of devil's club, which induces stupor and is favourable for dreaming. No woman might pass near his lodge, and if he visited his parents he but lengthened the term of his isolation. He stayed alone in his lodge, seeking the dream that would give him medicine power.

Not every youth obtained a significant dream that gave him medicine power; but if he performed the ritual faithfully he was sure to receive one of the three blessings for which he had prayed, swiftness of foot, accuracy of aim, or medicine power. Power came through dreaming of some animal, a caribou, or a grizzly bear; and it would be the greater the nearer the animal approached him, the more familiarly it allowed him to handle it. If he could touch it, if he could place his hand in its mouth, he was certain of great power. It would be greater still if he dreamed of three animals, and obtained medicine from each one. With each medicine went a song, a song sung by the animal about itself. Two caribou medicine songs ran as follows:

- (a) O mother caribou bring your young.  
 Bring them slowly and feed on the grounds where you will find plenty.  
 When you come come carefully.  
 The spirit of my patient hovers near.  
 Don't crowd your young, lest they trample on my patient's spirit.  
 (i.e. as you slowly come so will the health of my patient return)

<sup>1</sup> No Long Grass hunter would eat the head of any animal lest his tongue should hang out while he was pursuing game and make him short of wind.

(b) I need your help, O caribou.

Come swiftly to me.

You see I have laid my hands on the sufferer.

Come and lay your hoofs where I have laid my hands.

I need your help.

Without your help there is no healing in my hands today.

Come so quickly that your tail stands erect.

The songs and dreams did not originate with each new medicine-man, but were inherited mystically from some ancestor. A great medicine-man who had received power from many animals might even impart some of it to his son; but only if the latter were sickly, since the father was bestowing breath from his own life. Father and son then slept together under one blanket inside the family lodge, and when the father dreamed of his medicine song the son dreamed the same song with him, and could sing it without prompting when he awakened; the medicine power accompanied the song.

Every medicine-man had his own charms or amulets, things that his dream animal told him to use when effecting a cure. He might wear the velvet of a caribou horn attached to his clothing or carry it in a bag by his side wrapped in white swansdown; or his charm might be a strip of fur from a mountain goat or a grizzly bear. Sometimes he painted it on his drum, for the Long Grass medicine-men, although rejecting the rattle of the coast tribes, adopted the use of the drum. When he was called in to heal a patient the door was shut, and no one allowed to enter or go out. Little children who might be present had to remain quiet and take no part in the performance. The medicine-man sat beside the patient and sang his song, and the audience joined in the singing. At a certain stage he laid his charm on the sick man, and his medicine power, working through the charm, effected a cure. The patient was not healed at one sitting; but the ceremony had to be performed repeatedly, night after night, until the cure was complete.

This was the true medicine-man, the only man who had medicine for healing. He charged so high a price for his services that he was summoned for serious cases only. For lesser cases the natives would call in a dreamer, a lower order of medicine-man, who underwent the same training, but received power from his dream only to determine the cause of a malady, not to cure it. Often the mere knowledge of the cause sufficed to dispel the ailment; if it failed the dreamer advised the relatives to call in a fully qualified medicine-man to co-operate in the cure.

The procedure of dreamers differed slightly, but one woman treated her patient in the following manner. She sat down beside him and asked her heart whether he would live or die. Her heart suddenly leaped into her mouth, rendering her half unconscious. Bystanders placed swansdown on her head and vermilion on her cheeks to allay its throbbing. Gradually she recovered her poise, and gave her diagnosis. If the case were serious she might say "I saw the spirit of an animal resting on his chest; if it reaches his throat he will die. Summon a real medicine-man who has cut



a tongue and received the power of healing." The relatives sent for the best medicine-man in the neighbourhood, who, in co-operation with the dreamer, sang over the patient, laid his charm upon him, and effected a cure.

The most powerful medicine came from a rare bird, named *mis'kaiya*, a fish-eater, pure white, about the size of a duck. The youth who caught it and burned its tongue became one of the greatest medicine-men in the community. Next to this bird ranked medicine from the caribou, because the caribou, being a swift runner, effects the speediest cure. Below caribou ranked mountain sheep, and below that again grizzly bear and other animals.

Women underwent a different training in girlhood and could not qualify as professional healers. They could, however, become dreamers. A father might make his daughter a dreamer as he made his son a medicine-man, by sleeping under the same blanket with her, and inducing the same dream and song. When a girl was about two years old the mother sometimes inserted in her ears the two sharp bones that lie under the tongue of the raven. Gradually the skin grew over them, the girl became keen of hearing, and as she grew to womanhood was very susceptible to dreams. In her dreams she could understand the raven that visited and spoke to her. She could even foretell what would happen in the near future, the death of a neighbour, or the number of caribou he would kill on his next hunt.

A violent form of hysteria, which sometimes developed into total dementia, was very common among the Sekani and surrounding tribes. The Indians of Fort McLeod attributed it to the breaking of a food taboo, especially a taboo imposed when receiving medicine power. But the Sekani of Fort Grahame, the Long Grass band, and some of the Carrier tribes, attributed it to the land-otter. The simpler and probably older form of the belief was found at Fort Grahame. The natives of that place asserted that the otter assumed the form of a youth or maiden and seduced its victim, who forthwith became insane. One method of cure was to lash the man to a tree near the edge of a lake and await the otter's appearance. The animal approached at the insane man's call, and was shot by hunters concealed in the bushes. Its victim recovered his senses after drinking some fluid from its body. No cautious man or woman was ever deceived by the otter, for its teeth always remained those of an animal when the rest of its form became human, and it hid its mouth when it smiled.

A recent case of otter-sickness, or hysteria, was treated at Fort Grahame, the natives say, by a Kaska medicine-man from McDame, on Dease river. Beating a drum, he danced and sang over his patient, and extracted from the young man's chest the otter spirit that provoked the malady. The youth was cured, but the medicine-man warned him to avoid otters thereafter. Four years later the youth met another otter and died.

The T'lotona or Long Grass Indians, under the influence of the Gitksan, reinterpreted the otter belief so that it explained not only hysteria,



but tuberculosis. They held that the otter stole the breath of its victim, who might become subject to paroxysms of hysteria, but more frequently languished in a kind of trance, dreaming of the otter night and day. Unmarried individuals alone were susceptible, and girls more than youths, especially girls who were disappointed in love. Medicine-men sometimes effected a cure, restoring the patient's breath by singing and drumming; the patient then acquired the lower grade of medicine power, the gift of prophecy and of diagnosing the cause of sickness through dreams. But often the medicine-man failed and the patient died. So susceptible were unmarried girls that their contact with any part of the otter was liable to induce the disease. Hence a man who had been rejected by a girl would secretly mix with her food the tip of the otter's tail, or one of its whiskers. Sometimes she became so crazy that she followed him everywhere. At other times the "medicine" appeared to have no effect, and the girl might marry and even bear children. But after two or three years she became languid and comatose. A medicine-man might cure her, but no one could discover who had "poisoned" her food.

## APPENDIX

EXTRACTS FROM THE FIRST JOURNAL OF SIMON FRASER, 1806  
*(Series C. No. 16, Bancroft Collection, Pacific Coast MSS., University of California, Berkeley. Copy in Library of Geological Survey, Canada, Ottawa)*

"Wednesday 16th April. About 9 A.M. Mr. John McKinver arrived<sup>1</sup> from the Meadow Indians, after an absence of seventy odd days. he informs us of his having starved much at different times. He accompanied the Indians far off in search of Beaver but though they saw many Beaver Lodges they killed but few on account of the depth of snow which is from five to six feet deep in the Beaver country. They saw no large animals of any kind no not even a track during their long and intricate route until within two days march of the upper end of the Portage at the place they returned the Indians showed him the place where Trout Lake<sup>2</sup> was and told him it was only three encampments distant from there but he could get no one to accompany him the place where Trout Lake<sup>2</sup> was and told him it was only three and the misery they endure to go there and from there to come here proves this plan to be of little use. Could it be done it would certainly be more proper to send them all to Trout Lake where Beaver is near the Fort and it is certain they will never work well until they have an establishment formed in the Beaver country."

"Wednesday 23rd April. Menard arrived with four young men from the chiefs band they brought 22 Beaver skins, 2 carcasses and six Pechauses belonging to the chief which are well dressed, traded the value of two skins. These Indians are not Meadow Indians but of another tribe and the relations of the chief who always sides with the Meadow Indians and who has much authority over them. We attempted to get some information concerning their country but they seemed rather stupid and not much inclined to satisfy our desires which perhaps is not a little owing to the little knowledge we have of their language for our interpreters are none of the best. however we understood that Finlays branch does not terminate in chutes and Rapids as reported but with the intervening of some Portages that it is navigable to its source and from thence there is a Portage about half the length of this, a large Lake called Bear Lake where the Salmon comes up, and from there is a River that falls into another much larger (according to their Report than over the Peace River) that glides in northwest direction. In that Lake they say there are plenty of fish and that the salmon are unnumerable with plenty of Bears and animals of the fur kind there about, but no large animals of any kind. It is from that

<sup>1</sup> At Rocky Mountain Portage, i.e., Hudson Hope.

<sup>2</sup> Now called McLeod lake.

quarter they get their Iron works and ornaments but they represent the navigation beyond that Lake as unpracticable and say there are no other Indians excepting a few of their relations that never saw white people there about and to get Iron works they must go far beyond it, which they perform in long journeys on foot. We cannot imagine what River this is by their description and the course it runs it cannot be the Columbia, and I know of no other excepting Cooks, but whatever River it is and wherever they get these, their Iron works and ornaments are such as I have seen with the Cassuss.<sup>1</sup>"

"Tuesday 6th May. By what we could learn from the Indians at different times an establishment would be well placed on the big River that falls into the main branch of the Peace River, about half way between this and the Beaver River. This River at its confluence with the Peace River is large and appears to contain a large quantity of water and the Indians say it is navigable a considerable way up, and that Beaver, Bears, and large animals of all kinds are amazing numerous. it is thereabout is what may be properly called the Meadow Indians or as they call themselves *Les Gens du large* lands. But it is then likewise they are most subject to be killed by the Beaver Indians of both forks and Fort Vermillion and on that account they seldom now remain there but nine tenths of the year. But out in the mountains where there is neither Beaver nor anything else but Badgers and where they under go great misery, according to their reports there is but a very short distance from that River to a branch of McKenzies River that the *Nakanés* inhabit with whom they have often intercourse. Most every one of them told us if there was a Fort on the Banks of that Big River and if the Beaver Indians could be prevented from killing them that they would make excellent hunts and that it was the only good place they knew."

"Friday, May 9th. Menard and the Indians arrived. They had a few skins Beaver Credit and traded 30 with the value of 80 skins dried provisions and twenty on Aryenal skins. This is the band of Indians that were attacked last summer by the Fort Vermillion Indians and they did not see the Fort since they were at the Beaver River two years ago consequently they never saw this place before. Last winter they went down within two or three days march of Beaver River but were not at the Fort. I reprimanded them severely for not coming here last Fall and asked them the cause of not making a better, to which they replied that they had made a few furs but that they lost all when attacked by the Beaver Indians and that ever since they generally kept in their lurking holes in the mountains and that they wished to come and see white people in the Fall but did not know where to find them, their being none at Beaver and being told that this place was abandoned in the Spring and transferred to Tinlays

<sup>1</sup> Carriers.

branch they went there but found no one in consequence of which they thought the white People had abandoned the country and then returned to their lands where they were found in the month of March by Indians that had been out on purpose to look for them in the month of February who informed them of there being a Fort here."

"Wednesday May 28th. In the morning Pauce Coupe's comrade came to us<sup>1</sup> with a couple of Indians that never saw white people before. they are exceedingly well clothed in leather and though they never were at the Fort, they have guns which they got from their relations. They are the relations of the Meadow chief but of a different family. They gave us some information about their lands. What information we got from these Indians is chiefly about Finlay's branch and the country beyond it, which is conformable to what we have heard from the other Indians at the Portage. The only additional information we got from them is that there is an immense number of Beaver all along Finlay's branch and the River that falls into it and that there are a few camibance about what they call the Bear Lake. They seem to be well acquainted with the Carriers with whom they live in amity and from whom I imagine they got the most part of their Iron works and ornaments at least they are of the same kind. They desired us to be on our guard and beware of the At-Tah which is the name both them and the big men gives the Atnah tribe whom they represent as more treacherous than really wicked and would likely if not aware shoot their arrows at us."

"Thursday 10th July. This<sup>2</sup> is a fine River and not unlike the Athabasca but not so large and the Indian we left at the height or point of land informed us that the upper end of it was the most ordinary residence of the *Says-Thaw Dennehs* (Bawcenne Indians) which corroborates with what the Carriers tell us of these Indians, they being enemies, when they go a hunting in that quarter, I have seen one that was wounded last summer and his brother was killed, which is likely the same that was mentioned by one of the Bancanne Indians last winter at Dunvegan as being killed there. All accounts agree that large animals as well as those of the fur kind are in great abundance particularly towards the upper end, could this be relied upon and that the Bancanne Indians are really thereabouts an establishment is my opinion would be well placed at the point of land.<sup>3</sup> There is excellent fish in the three Lakes and in two of them Salmon abounds in its season and by all accounts animals are not far off, indeed of this we had ocular demonstration ourselves so that people would live well there a no immaterial object in this quarter and the Baucanne Indians would be much more easily got to come there than to any part of the Peace River on account of their being afraid of the Beaver Indians, and the Big men, though they seldom meet they live in amity."

<sup>1</sup> At Finlay Forks.

<sup>2</sup> McGregor river.

<sup>3</sup> The divide between Parsnip and Fraser rivers.

